DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 469 254 UD 035 295

AUTHOR Simon, Elaine; Pickron-Davis, Marcine; Brown, Chris

TITLE Case Study: New York ACORN. Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools. The Indicators Project on Education Organizing.

INSTITUTION Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, Chicago, IL.; Research for Action, Inc., Philadelphia, PA.

SPONS AGENCY BellSouth Foundation, Inc. Atlanta, GA.; Annie E. Casey Foundation, Baltimore, MD.; Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, New York, NY.; Ford Foundation, New York, NY.; Edward W. Hazen Foundation, Inc., New Haven, CT.; Mott (C.S.) Foundation, Flint, MI.; Rockefeller Foundation, New York, NY.; William Penn Foundation, Philadelphia, PA.; Needmor Fund, Toledo, OH.

PUB DATE 2002-03-00

NOTE 44p.; For other reports from the Indicators Project on Education, see UD 035 291-298. Photographs may not reproduce well.

AVAILABLE FROM Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, 407 South Dearborn, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60605 ($10). Tel: 312-322-4880; Fax: 312-322-4885; Web site: http://www.crosscity.org.

PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.

DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; *Community Organizations; Curriculum; *Educational Change; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; Leadership Training; Low Income Groups; *Neighborhood Schools; Public Schools; *School Community Relationship; Urban Schools

IDENTIFIERS New York (New York)

ABSTRACT

This report describes New York City's ACORN (Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now), which has a 20-year history of organizing in the City and emphasizes public education issues. ACORN works at both the neighborhood and policy level. It is one of five case studies in the Indicators Project on Education Organizing, which identified eight indicators of the impact of community organizing for school reform (leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, equity, school-community connection, positive school climate, and high quality curriculum and instruction). This report focuses on ACORN's accomplishments in four areas: equity, leadership development, community power, and high quality curriculum and instruction. The report presents a model of the relationship of indicators to goals of the community organizing groups, introduces ACORN, describes the context of education organizing in New York City, and looks at indicators and measures. It concludes by discussing future directions (e.g., reforming public education on a large scale). Three appendices present definitions of indicator areas, the Indicators Project advisory group, and ACORN charts (strategies, results, and data sources). (SM)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original document.

ED 469 254

CROSS CITY CAMPAIGN FOR URBAN SCHOOL REFORM

PREPARED BY RESEARCH FOR ACTION

Case Study:

NEW YORK ACORN

Strong Neighborhoods Strong Schools

The Indicators Project on Education Organizing

UD 035 295

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

C. Brown
Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Case Study:

NEW YORK ACORN

Prepared by

RESEARCH FOR ACTION
Elaine Simon and Marcine Pickron-Davis

with

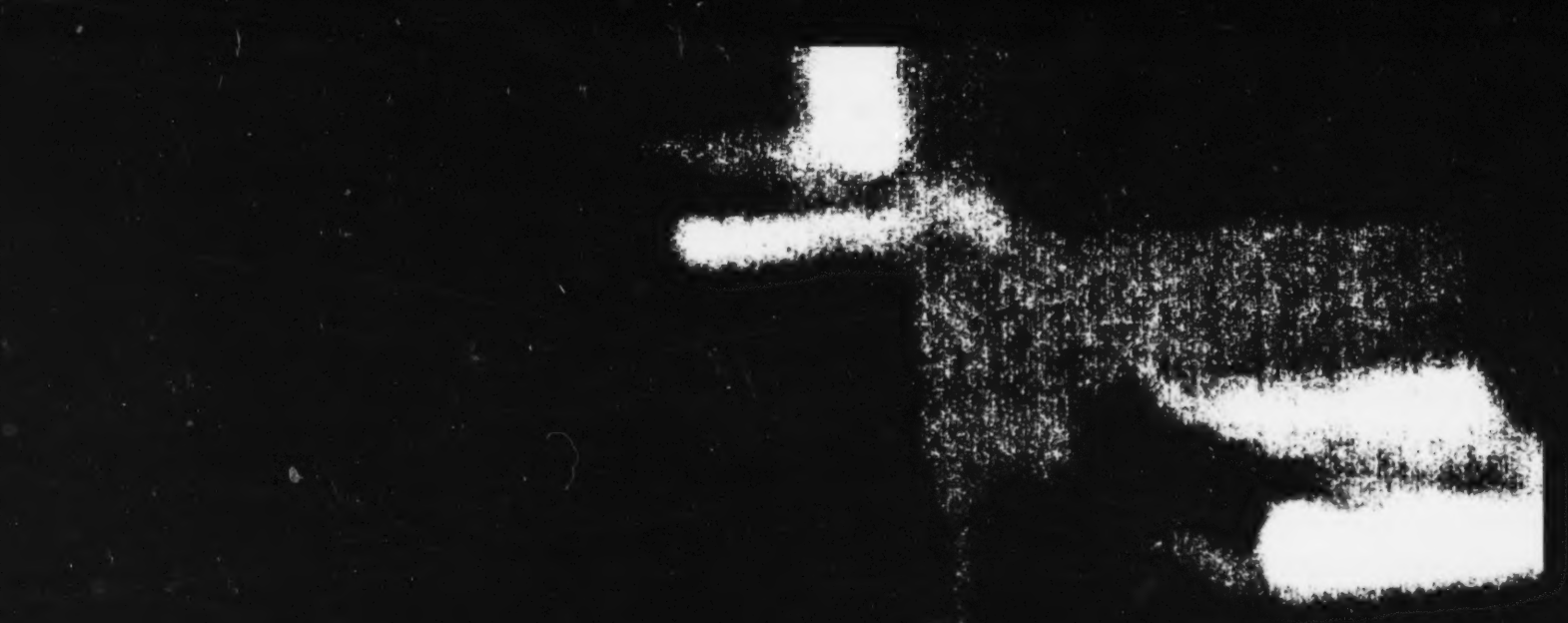
CROSS CITY CAMPAIGN FOR URBAN SCHOOL REFORM
Chris Brown

COPYRIGHT MARCH 2002

Strong Neighborhoods Strong Schools

The Indicators Project on Education Organizing

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the Executive Director, organizers, and leaders of New York ACORN for their participation in this study and their contribution to our understanding of community organizing for school reform.

We also acknowledge the generous support of the following foundations:

BELLSOUTH FOUNDATION

ANNIE E. CASEY FOUNDATION

EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION

FORD FOUNDATION

EDWARD W. HAZEN FOUNDATION

CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

NEEDMOR FUND

WILLIAM PENN FOUNDATION

ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

For additional copies of this publication, contact:

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
407 South Dearborn, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60605
Telephone: 312.322.4880 Fax: 312.322.4885
www.crosscity.org

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table of Contents

The Indicators Project on Education Organizing 5

Model of the Relationship of Indicator Areas to Goals of the Community Organizing Groups 6

Introduction to New York ACORN 7

The Context of Education Organizing in New York City 9

Schools, Policy, and Organizing 10

Indicators and Measures 14

First Indicator Area
Equity 15

Second Indicator Area
Leadership Development 20

Third Indicator Area
Community Power 22

Fourth Indicator Area
High Quality Curriculum and Instruction 26

Future Directions 28

Appendix A
Definitions of Indicator Areas 31

Appendix B
Indicators Project Advisory Group 32

Appendix C
ACORN Indicator Charts (Strategies, Results and Data Sources) 33

About the Authors 41

Contact Information 41

The Indicators Project on Education Organizing

New York ACORN is one of five case studies in *The Indicators Project*, an action-research project to document the contribution that community organizing makes to school reform, disseminate the findings, and forward the work these groups are doing. The project grows out of the work of the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform's Schools and Community program. The Cross City Campaign believes that while there is widespread agreement among educators and the public on the importance of "parent involvement" and "parents as first teachers," there is far less understanding of the role that strong, well-informed, powerful organizations of parent and community leaders can play in school reform. The Cross City Campaign invited Research for Action, a non-profit educational research organization with a history of studying community-school relations, to be its partner in examining the contribution such organizations can make in bringing about quality educational experiences and equity for urban students and in strengthening low-income urban neighborhoods.

See report *Successful Community Organizing for School Reform* for a full discussion of the Education Organizing Indicators Framework and how accomplishments in the indicator areas work together to bring about change in schools and communities.

The aim of the research was to develop an Education Organizing Indicators Framework that documents observable outcomes in schools and student learning. We developed the Framework by looking at the activities of organizing groups across multiple sites and categorizing their work within eight key indicator areas. The eight indicator areas are: leadership development, community power, social capital, public accountability, equity, school/community connections, positive school climate, and high quality instruction and curriculum. (See Appendix A for definitions of the indicator areas). We also developed a Theory of Change that shows how work in each of the indicator areas contributes to building community capacity and improving schools—ultimately increasing student learning. (See p. 6 for a model of the Theory of Change.)

A major purpose of this report and the project's other case studies is to show the accomplishments of community organizing for school reform by using the Education Organizing Indicators Framework. We illustrate the utility of the Framework for documenting the contribution of community organizing groups to school reform by looking at selected organizing "stories" in some depth. In each report, we use four of the indicator areas to interpret the organizing stories, showing evidence that the group is making a difference. The report also shows the complexity and challenge of community organizing for school reform. It illustrates the range of strategies that groups use, how local context affects organizing and outcomes, as well as how organizing spurs and shapes local education reform.

CHARACTERISTICS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING GROUPS

Community organizing groups working for school reform share the following characteristics:

- They work to change public schools to make them more equitable and effective for all students.
- They build a large base of members who take collective action to further their agenda.
- They build relationships and collective responsibility by identifying shared concerns among neighborhood residents and creating alliances and coalitions that cross neighborhood and institutional boundaries.
- They develop leadership among community residents to carry out agendas that the membership determines through a democratic governance structure.
- They use the strategies of adult education, civic participation, public action, and negotiation to build power for residents of low- to moderate-income communities that results in action to address their concerns.

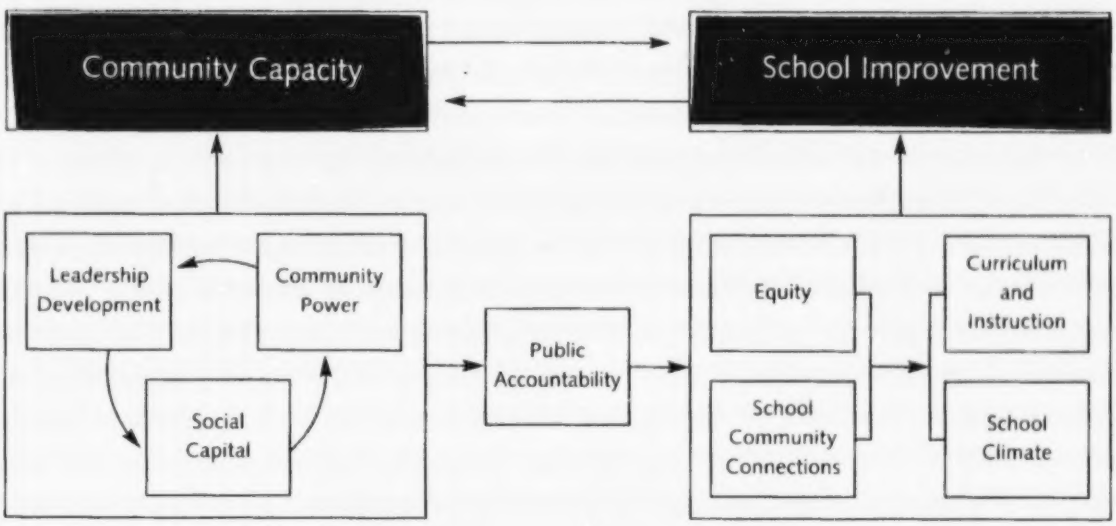
RESEARCH APPROACH

In order to develop an indicators framework the research design included four levels of investigation:

- Research for Action (RFA) and the Cross City Campaign (CCC) conducted a broad search and created a database of 140 community organizing groups working on school reform nationwide.
- RFA and CCC collaborated to select 19 groups for lengthy telephone interviews. Analysis of those interviews yielded a preliminary indicators framework.
- RFA and CCC, with the help of a national advisory group (see appendix B) selected five groups for case studies.
- RFA research teams and CCC staff conducted two site-visits of three days each in spring and fall of 2000 to each of the five sites. Interviews were conducted with a wide array of public school stakeholders, including parents, teachers, administrators, elected officials, and education reform groups. The researchers also observed community and school events relevant to local organizing.

THE PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT IS TO SHOW THE ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF COMMUNITY ORGANIZING.

Theory of Change: Relationship of Community Capacity Building and School Improvement



The theory of change model shows the pathway of influence between building community capacity and school improvement. Work in three indicator areas—leadership development, community power, and social capital—increases civic participation and leverages power through partnerships and relationships within and across communities, as well as with school district, civic, and elected officials. Public accountability is the hinge that connects community capacity with school improvement. Increased community participation and strong relationships together broaden accountability for improving public education for children of low- to moderate-income families. Public accountability creates the political will to forward equity and school/community connection, thereby improving school climate, curriculum, and instruction making them more responsive to communities, laying the basis for improved student learning and achievement. Stronger schools, in turn, contribute to strengthening community capacity.

Introduction to New York ACORN

"As a membership-based low-income organization that works in low-income neighborhoods, not for one single moment [have we] ever separated schools and community. You can no more separate schools from our membership than you can separate gender. Members have been students, do have kids, continue in education, schools are in their neighborhoods, there is no separation. They do not think of education in an abstract way." ORGANIZER

ACORN's twenty years of organizing in New York City gained it a strong reputation in the areas of housing and economic justice. However, local neighborhood organizing always surfaced education and schools as pressing concerns. When ACORN decided to build a focus on education organizing, it brought its considerable organizing expertise and relationships with key decision-makers to bear in this arena. In 1988, NY ACORN established a Schools Office, overseen by a citywide Education Committee and staffed by organizers dedicated to working on public education issues.

Just as in its organizing around housing, where ACORN worked at both the neighborhood and policy levels, its education work also proceeds on multiple levels simultaneously. ACORN addresses *local issues* as it develops neighborhood-based leadership to gain input and improvements in their neighborhood schools. ACORN has established *new schools* and is a partner in three autonomous high schools in Brooklyn and Washington Heights. ACORN also addresses *broader policy issues*. ACORN has carried out a series of *policy studies* coming from its members' experiences of inequities and have issued *reports* which form the basis of cross-district and citywide campaigns to bring about more equitable opportunities for low-income, minority children. ACORN works in collaboration with other *citywide* organizing groups around issues of overcrowding and class size, and in a campaign to improve the schools across three districts in the South Bronx. Recently, NY ACORN entered into an alliance with other powerful organizations to influence spending for public education at the *state* level.

The levels of ACORN's education organizing are interrelated and support one another. ACORN's success in establishing schools has earned it the credentials to push for change in city and state education policy. ACORN's policy reports have also earned it credentials in the education reform community, and built knowledge and confidence among its grass-roots constituency. This in turn has strengthened ACORN's power to support schools and make gains at the neighborhood level. ACORN's different areas of work are also mutually reinforcing. For example, ACORN's education work draws on relationships developed with city officials and politicians through its housing work.

ACORN is active in all eight indicator areas used in this project.[1] In this report, we relate ACORN's accomplishments in detail in four of the areas[2]. The four areas are:

- **EQUITY**
- **LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**
- **COMMUNITY POWER**
- **HIGH QUALITY CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

NOTES

1. For a chart representing ACORN's work in all eight indicator areas, see Appendix C. This chart is not comprehensive, but does illustrate the kinds of strategies ACORN has used in each area and examples of its achievements.

2. The data supporting the accomplishments of ACORN were gathered during site visits in spring and fall 2000. The report is not comprehensive of all ACORN has accomplished, but is intended to illustrate what documentation and measurement of its accomplishments might look like.

New York ACORN

ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, was founded in 1970. It emerged from the National Welfare Rights Organization and expanded its constituency to include moderate-income and working-poor families. According to its website, ACORN has grown to become "the nation's largest community organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over 100,000 member families organized into 500 neighborhood chapters in forty cities across the country." ACORN is a multi-issue organization whose work, both nationally and at the local level, centers around affordable housing, living wages for low-wage workers, increasing investment by banks and governments in low-income communities, and improving public schools. ACORN's approach includes "direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation." Funding comes from annual dues from member families, fundraising events, and foundation grants. ACORN members participate in a national convention every other year that focuses on a particular issue of interest to the organization. The Philadelphia convention in June 2000 focused on predatory lending.

New York ACORN was founded in 1981. Its membership comes from across the city, primarily from neighborhoods in Brooklyn, Queens, the South Bronx, and Washington Heights/Harlem. Its over 22,000 members are a cross section of those neighborhoods, mostly African-American, Afro-Caribbean, Puerto Rican, and Dominican. Its members are residents in half of the thirty-two New York City community school districts.

The Schools Office of New York ACORN was founded in 1988 to forward members' growing interest in education issues. The staff of the Schools Office consists of an organizer assigned to each of the three ACORN High Schools and two full-time senior staff who support the work of the organizers. The Schools Office is responsible for the ACORN High Schools as well as the citywide campaigns. Other ACORN staff members also support these wider campaigns. A citywide committee of parents provides oversight to the Schools Office. NY ACORN as a whole is governed by an Executive Committee. New York ACORN shares its Brooklyn office with the National ACORN Schools Office.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

The Context of Education Organizing in New York City

New York City is the largest school system in the country, with almost 1,200 schools and 1.1 million students. New York schools are governed through an evolving and often highly politically charged mix of decentralized and centralized authority (see box). The sheer size and complexity of the school system in New York City challenges the ingenuity of organizers to identify points of entry.

Authority over the schools is divided between the community school boards and the chancellor. When the districts were created, there was a deliberate attempt to make them diverse, in order to avoid the dominance of any one ethnic or racial group. In some districts, competing interests add to the challenge of organizing to improve schools.

Another challenge to organizing is the high turnover in district leadership at all levels, but particularly at the top. Contributing to chancellor turnover have been clashes with two-term Mayor Guiliani, a strong proponent of centralized control, privatization, and vouchers.

While many community school districts are quite diverse, highly segregated residential patterns in New York City result in other districts being almost entirely made up of low-income African-American and/or Latino students. The city also presents contrasts in wealth, particularly between Manhattan and the other boroughs. The community school districts also reflect this uneven distribution of resources and investments. In many of the poorest and racially/ethnically isolated neighborhoods, schools experience serious overcrowding, larger class size, more difficulty recruiting experienced and certified teachers, fewer materials, more deteriorated facilities, and less effective principal leadership. Efforts to use what funds there are to relieve overcrowding and reduce class size are confounded by the scarcity of affordable space and the costs of improving existing facilities and building new ones. In the past year, citizens groups and legislators have challenged convoluted state funding formulas that result in lower per pupil expenditures in New York City than in its surrounding suburban communities.

There have been two (sometimes competing) trends in school reform in New York City over the last decade. On the one hand, an approach of providing options within the public school system has spawned a significant number of small autonomous schools and schools within schools. The small schools are often formed in partnership with community-based organizations or other kinds of non-profit partners. The Annenberg Challenge investment of $25 million in New York City endorsed this strategy when it funded the New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR), a partnership of four groups dedicated to establishing and supporting small schools and public school choice. NYNSYR, whose goal was to establish a "critical mass" of small schools in New York City, claims more than 140 such programs. Most of these programs are recognized as autonomous, but still under the Central Board of Education's auspices. Relatively new charter legislation has made it possible for some of these schools and for new schools to be established outside the system. This process is just beginning. Other options within the New York City system are gifted programs and special admission high schools. Students can apply to gifted programs within their neighborhood schools or they can get variances to attend these

NEW YORK CITY SCHOOL GOVERNANCE

The New York City school system is governed by a seven-member Central Board of Education which includes an additional non-voting student representative appointed by the Board. Borough presidents appoint five of the voting members, and the mayor appoints the other two.

The Central Board hires the chancellor. In recent years, there has been rapid turnover in the chancellorship. There have been four chancellors since 1990: Joseph A. Fernandez (1990-1993), Ramon C. Cortines (1993-1995), Rudolph F. Crew (1995-2000), and Harold O. Levy (2000-present).

The school system is divided into 32 community school districts, each with an elected board that oversees elementary and junior high schools. Each community school board hires its own superintendent. There are nine high school districts with superintendents appointed by the chancellor. There is also a "Chancellor's District," which includes schools from across the city identified as low performing. Chancellor's District schools receive additional supports to improve teaching and learning.

The structure of control of the education system has been debated, with the former and current mayor favoring stronger mayoral control.

programs from outside the area. ACORN's policy studies have pointed up the under-representation of African-American and Latino students in the gifted programs and special admissions high schools.

The other trend in school reform has been towards standards and accountability. This trend is strengthened by the state's abandoning of the two-tier system of Regents and regular diplomas, so that all students must earn the more rigorous Regents diploma in order to graduate. Reports on passing rates on the Regents in the past year have shown that New York City lags behind the state as a whole; both rural and urban districts are far behind suburban districts. During his term, Chancellor Crew pushed testing, standards and accountability, an end to social promotion, and required summer school for students with low test scores. To address the district's lowest-performing schools, he created a special "Chancellor's District," which provides extra resources and services to about forty schools. This focus on school and student performance has heightened the public's concerns about students' performance on the tests and drawn attention to the issue of what schools and students need to be able to do to meet the new standards.

Schools, Policy, and Organizing

As noted above, New York ACORN works on multiple tracks and levels, each reinforcing the other. In addition, early efforts provided lessons that helped ACORN to sharpen and refine its approach to education organizing.

Early Efforts and Lessons Learned

ACORN established the Schools Office in 1988 to coordinate the local work it was already doing through its neighborhood organizing. One of ACORN's first strategies to address the education issues that were coming up at the neighborhood level was to encourage members to run for community school boards. The effort was successful in winning seats—seven of twelve members who ran succeeded in getting elected to five boards—but it did not provide the kind of influence ACORN hoped for. For one thing, ACORN leaders were frustrated in their attempts to get community concerns on the local board's agendas. They found the boards more engaged in assigning contracts and hiring than in changing educational policy and improving schools. Furthermore, the local district level was not a place they could solve many of the problems they cared about, such as class size and teacher quality, because the solutions could only come from above. ACORN came to see the local boards as a "mid-level bureaucracy," and not a fruitful place to expend their energies. Nevertheless, leadership development was a significant positive outcome, with some of ACORN's strongest leaders emerging from the group that had won local board offices. As a result, ACORN decided to dedicate itself to a strategy of parent education and leadership development at the neighborhood level and this strategy is ongoing.

The first new schools that ACORN developed came out of neighborhood organizing in the early 1990s. As a result of dissatisfactions with their children's school experience, parents in Far Rockaway Queens worked to open the Rockaway New School, a K-6 unit within PS (Public School) 183. The school opened in 1991. Parents were involved in determining the curriculum, and by all accounts the school was successful. Parents were very satisfied, and the teachers who had designed and staffed the school were highly invested. Nonetheless, keeping the school going proved to be a challenge because its status as a school within a school required ongoing support from the principal and local district superintendent. Parents and teachers eventually lost the struggle for continuing support and recognition for the Rockaway New School when the local district assigned an unfriendly principal to PS 183 and a corruption investigation diverted attention at the district and local board level. From that experience, ACORN concluded that the New School's lack of autonomy made it difficult for ACORN to have a continued role and for the school to maintain its distinctive character.

In 1992, parents in Flatbush were concerned about their children being bused to faraway schools because the overcrowding in their own "zone" was so severe that placement in neighborhood schools was "frozen." At first, parents expressed concern primarily about safety on the bus, but through research they learned that the overcrowding in their neighborhood entitled them to demand a new school, which opened in September 1993 as PS 245. ACORN's involvement in obtaining and planning the new school was significant. Unlike the Rockaway New School, PS 245 was not a school within a school, but a regular New York City public school. Once the school opened, however, ACORN had no formal role

there, and after being instrumental in its establishment, its influence waned. Reflecting on the lesson learned from PS 245, an ACORN organizer told us, "PS 245 taught us that, in fact, once you have won, now your work begins. You need to keep the school accountable...keep organizing."

Network of New Autonomous Schools

While PS 245 had begun to relieve overcrowding and raise school quality at the elementary and middle school levels, ACORN members had limited access to strong high school alternatives. In 1992, ACORN members asked then-Chancellor Fernandez to open four small high schools in Brooklyn. At this time, the small schools movement in New York City was emerging, along with the precedent for community partners to shape programs. ACORN hoped that having a more formal partnership with the high schools than with the schools established through ACORN's earlier efforts would lead to a more permanent and sustainable program. They organized public actions, culminating in a rally of 1,500 ACORN members in early 1993 where then-Mayor Dinkins, the School Board president, and the deputy chancellor committed to opening the four schools. ACORN kept up the pressure to get all agreements through the two subsequent Chancellors.

While the Central Board of Education finally gave its blessing to ACORN starting the new schools, it offered little support in actually getting the schools up and running. ACORN members found the space for the new schools and worked with realtors, architects, and developers to make them a reality. As part of the process, ACORN members visited successful schools, participated in training, and met to plan the program. It took four years before the first ACORN high school opened.

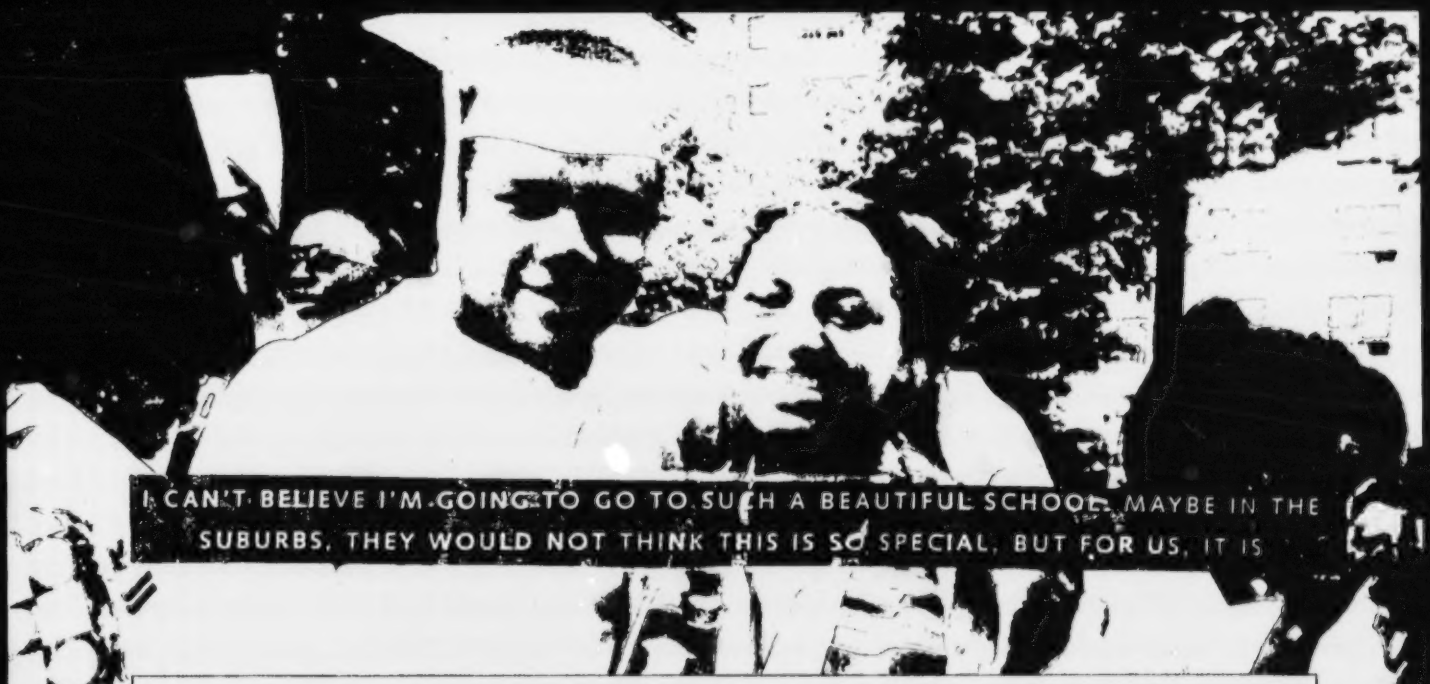
Establishing ACORN Community High School

The roots of ACORN's work to establish new schools grew out of its neighborhood organizing, where school quality is a pressing concern of its membership. In 1992, ACORN members challenged then-Chancellor Fernandez to address the lack of access to high quality high school alternatives in their neighborhoods; they asked him to commit to letting them open four small high schools in Brooklyn. Fernandez agreed to ACORN's demand for the schools, initiating a process of negotiation and design that took four years before the first school, ACORN Community High School (ACHS), opened its doors.

One step in the process of setting up a school is a memorandum of understanding, negotiated with one of the "superintendencies," units of the New York City schools decentralized governance structure. The early 1990s was a time when the city's small schools movement, led largely by educators, was taking shape. Fernandez had set up a Superintendency for Alternative High Schools to handle the wave of proposals for small schools and to negotiate the "memoranda of understanding." It became apparent that ACORN's would be caught in the logjam of proposals to the Alternative Superintendency. To speed up the process, the group turned to a local high school jurisdiction, the Brooklyn and Staten Island Superintendency (BASIS).

The position of Chancellor in New York turned over three times during this four-year period. Keeping the momentum going was a challenge. ACORN was able to draw on relationships previously developed with school board members with whom they had worked in past housing campaigns, who provided continuity and support throughout the period. When things slowed down, ACORN staged a rally in which they turned out 1,500 members as impetus to maintain forward motion.

Members met with school district officials to hammer out the details of the report and they visited other schools that could serve as a model. Members also attended evening meetings in which education experts introduced them to curriculum and pedagogy theory and where they worked to develop a vision and plans for the school. One ACORN member said, *"I went to so many meetings, every night, I almost lost my husband."* Coming out of this self-education process, the members envisioned a school that would have a *"commitment to high educational standards, innovative pedagogical practice oriented around themes of social change and social justice, and a genuinely democratic governance system with strong community and parent involvement."* (from ACORN documents)


I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M GOING TO GO TO SUCH A BEAUTIFUL SCHOOL. MAYBE IN THE SUBURBS, THEY WOULD NOT THINK THIS IS SO SPECIAL, BUT FOR US, IT IS

To hasten the progress of the ACHS memorandum of understanding, ACORN members began looking for a building that could house the school. They located a former warehouse in the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn and chose an architect to design a school that would reflect their vision for the program. The design included a dance studio, a science lab, a computer room, and a spacious library, a building where *"the classrooms, not the administrative offices, had the best views of the city."* (ACORN member)

ACORN realized from past experience that the School Construction Authority could also present obstacles both to the renovations they wanted and ultimately to obtaining the memorandum of understanding. So they again turned to a relationship they had formed through their work in developing housing. A developer they had worked with before was willing to put up his own money to renovate the building in exchange for a fifteen-year lease from the School Board. In this way, they avoided the School Construction Authority and obtained a final memorandum of understanding.

Not only were ACORN members involved in getting the doors of ACHS open, they also participated in hiring staff. ACORN members, with the support of the BASIS Superintendent, participated in hiring the "Project Director," the administrator appointed for a one-year term to get a new small school up and running. Later, they also participated in hiring the permanent administrator. From these experiences, they learned about the challenges of staffing and discovered that it takes time to develop a working relationship. One ACORN member described the Project Director as resistant to the group's vision. *"She didn't understand the type of curriculum we wanted. We didn't want chalk and talk, we wanted children to interact with each other and an integrated curriculum. ... We wanted to hear noise in our classrooms because that would mean that the children were discussing the material."* From the beginning, ACORN organizers and members worked to involve all parents in holding the school accountable. As one parent explained, *"We would try to get them [parents] interested, and to understand their rights, that the principal is accountable to you, to your child and to her staff."*

The current administrator has been in place since year two. An ACORN high school principal faces the dilemma of having to respond both to the Board and to ACORN parents and members, but the principal and ACORN have endeavored to develop an effective working relationship. The principal has come to see ACORN as an ally, and ACORN has learned to appreciate the tensions she manages and where it makes sense to compromise. A member told of how parents convinced the principal that ACORN was her ally. When the principal invoked school board rules as an obstacle, they assured her, *"That's why we are here. We can deal with the board. ... We worked really, really hard to get this school. ... Yes, we're made up of low- and moderate-income families, but we are fighters. It has nothing to do with where you come from but how hard you're willing to fight for it."* ACORN organizers continue to refine ACORN's role as it works with the school's constituents, including students and teachers, to encourage communication and democratic participation.

On the day ACHS opened, a member of the first class said, *"I can't believe I'm going to go to such a beautiful school. Maybe in the suburbs, they would not think this is so special, but for us (in Brooklyn), it is."* This young woman graduated in 2000 with an average over 80, more than 20 points higher than her average when she entered high school. Her mother attributed it to her daughter's close relationship with her teachers.

There are currently three high schools in the ACORN schools network. Two are in Brooklyn. ACORN Community High School (ACHS) opened in Crown Heights, Brooklyn in 1996 with a 9th grade class. The first graduates finished in Spring 2000. The second Brooklyn high school in the ACORN network, and the second of the four promised for Brooklyn, was approved in 1996 as the ACORN High School for Social Justice (SOJO), to be located in the Bushwick neighborhood of Brooklyn. This school opened in 1999 in temporary quarters in the Cobble Hill section of Brooklyn.

ACORN became involved in a third high school in 1996 when two teachers from Bread & Roses Integrated Arts High School approached them for help in securing a space after their proposal had been approved as a New Visions school. After a courtship in which ACORN members learned about the school and the founding teachers agreed to incorporate the social justice theme, ACORN set up a series of meetings with school district officials that led to securing a building as well as requested facilities and equipment. Bread & Roses opened in Washington Heights in 1997.

In 1994, ACORN joined with the key New York groups advocating for the creation of small schools to form New York Networks for School Renewal (NYNSR). As noted earlier, the mission of NYNSR was to expand education options for New York City parents by creating a critical mass of small schools, both by supporting those already existing and by creating additional ones. The early planners were three established New York City nonprofits that had been involved in school restructuring and in facilitating principal- and teacher-initiated small schools. With ACORN's track record in starting small schools from a grassroots base, it was able to gain entry into this major school reform initiative, bringing to the effort its reputation as representing the interests of the city's low-income, mostly minority and immigrant children.

NEW YORK NETWORKS FOR SCHOOL RENEWAL

In addition to ACORN, the member partners of the NYNSR are the Center for Collaborative Education (CCE), the Center for Educational Innovation (the CEI), and New Visions for Public Schools. The goals of NYNSR are: to support the 140 small public schools in its network; to encourage school networks; to advance the concept of a "Learning Zone" where schools are exempt from some system requirements; to influence city and state reform initiatives in the areas of school budget, staffing, curriculum and assessment, and to increase funding for public education.

Policy Reports

A series of studies that document inequities in the New York City schools grew out of the contrasting experiences of two ACORN members in Far Rockaway. When a minority parent and a white parent compared notes on what they were told by school officials when they inquired about the programs that were available at their neighborhood elementary schools, they became concerned that their unequal treatment was a sign of systemic discrimination that limited options for minority and low-income students. They studied the issue systematically using a fair housing testing method, and in 1996 released the first Secret Apartheid report, *A Report on Racial Discrimination Against Black and Latino Parents and Children in the New York City Public Schools,* which showed that the experiences of the Rockaway parents were repeated all over the city. The study found significant differences in the information available to minority versus white parents, especially information about gifted programs starting in kindergarten that track students into magnet and other special programs at higher grade levels.

Secret Apartheid II: Race, Regents, and Resources, which came out the next year, followed up to further determine if schools were living up to mandated policies which required provision of consistent information to all families. It also took on the question of whether students have equal access to the rigorous coursework

SELECTED FINDINGS OF SECRET APARTHEID II

- More than half of the students attending the two elite "science" high schools come from three community school districts.
- The districts sending the most students to the two science high schools are more racially and ethnically mixed and have higher median income than those that send the least.
- Six districts together send less than one percent of the students and six others send only one percent each.
- Districts with greater availability of advanced math courses in middle school have a greater likelihood of sending students to the magnet high schools.

necessary to prepare them for the newly required Regents exam. *Secret Apartheid III: Follow-Up to Failure* came out in 1998, and documented how gifted programs sort students by race and ethnicity, despite the fact that federal funding targeted for these programs is intended to reduce segregation within schools.

Policy Work: District, City, and Statewide

ACORN is involved in two coalitions that address education equity and quality. The Parent Organizing Consortium (POC) includes a number of parent organizing groups across the city, and has pushed for increased and more equitable state spending for class-size reduction and school construction, as well as for raising teacher quality. More recently, ACORN and New York Citizen Action initiated a statewide coalition, the Alliance for Quality Education (AQE), to lobby the state legislature for more funding. The core group of Alliance partners includes: three teachers' unions, with New York City's United Federation of Teachers the largest among them; New York University's Institute for Education and Social Policy; and the Fiscal Policy Institute, based in Albany. According to a key Alliance leader, the Alliance focuses on needs which are widely agreed on—books, lower class size, qualified teachers, early childhood education, and decent facilities.

The South Bronx School Improvement Campaign, working across three local districts, is another effort aimed at changing policy on a broader level. Coming out of its local organizing in the South Bronx and parents' dissatisfaction with the quality of schools in the area, ACORN developed a campaign with the assistance of NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP). IESP's research showed that the schools in three community school districts in the South Bronx were among the worst in the city in terms of student achievement and teacher quality.

ACORN's report, *No Silver Bullet: A Call for Doing What Works,* which was released in May 1999, focused on the South Bronx in corroborating the findings of the *Secret Apartheid* studies about inadequate opportunities in the New York City schools for low-income, minority students. For example, the report pointed out that only one member of the Class of 1998 in all thirteen of the South Bronx high schools earned a Regents diploma after four years, and fewer than one eighth grader in thirteen had the opportunity to take Regents level coursework.

As a kick off to the campaign to improve South Bronx schools, the report called on the chancellor to establish a "South Bronx Improvement Zone" for three of the community school districts, and to use proven curricula and raise teacher quality. The elements of the campaign, outlined in the report include: an incentive program to attract experienced teachers, increased spending for professional development, an incentive program to attract skilled and motivated principals, implementation of the Success for All reading program, reduced class size, an extended day academic program, and a new ACORN High School in the Bronx. ACORN partnered with the United Federation of Teachers in calling for improvements that relate to teaching and teacher recruitment. Parent leaders succeeded in meeting with Chancellor Levy, and gained a commitment for a pilot of the program.

Indicators and Measures

ACORN is active in every indicator area. This report, however, discusses ACORN's activity in four of the eight indicator areas: equity, leadership development, community power, and high quality curriculum and instruction. We selected these areas because they were particularly salient in both the interviews we conducted and the events we observed during site visits. Archival documentation, including reports and newspaper clippings, supports these as areas of ACORN's accomplishment.

The discussion begins with ACORN's accomplishments in the area of equity. A focus on equity pervades ACORN's work, which has included bringing new facilities and resources into neglected neighborhoods, getting policy changed to increase access to gifted and magnet programs, sustaining the call for equity, and building political and public will to increase spending for public schools.

Next we examine ACORN's efforts in terms of leadership development. ACORN looks at all of its work as an opportunity for developing leadership skills and a sense of efficacy among teachers, students, and parents. One distinctive feature of ACORN's leadership development is that it works directly with high school students and youth.[3] Evidence of ACORN's accomplishments

NOTES

3. In addition to working with students in the ACORN high schools, ACORN works with the younger children of adult ACORN members through ACORN Junior.

in this area include: creating settings for leadership development; ACORN members' gains in knowledge about education and school improvement; and ACORN members' increasing sense of their ability to influence others and bring about change.

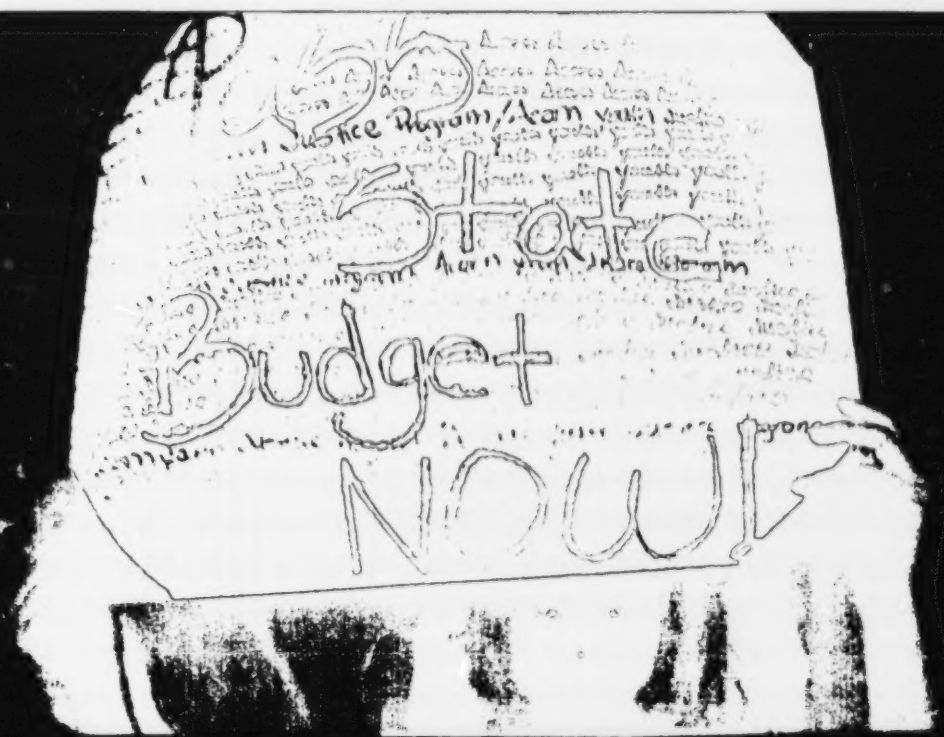
The third indicator area discussed here is community power. Evidence of ACORN's power include: widespread recognition that ACORN represents the voices of parents and community members; public recognition of ACORN's "education credentials"; public officials' responsiveness to ACORN's demands; and ACORN's ability to cut through bureaucracy to move plans forward or protect its schools from interference. ACORN has been able to build powerful partnerships, play a major role in shaping the education reform agenda, and gain "a seat at the table" as a leader among education organizing groups.

Finally, the report looks at ACORN's work in the area of strengthening instruction and curriculum. In this area, ACORN has brought attention to the lack of challenging coursework and issues of teacher quality in many schools. Through its high schools, ACORN has developed curriculum and activities with the potential to engage students and teach them about the political and social environments of their communities. ACORN's extensive work at the high school level distinguishes it from other education organizing groups, which, until recently, have mainly focused on elementary schools. ACORN has also brought about a focus on reading achievement in South Bronx schools.

First Indicator Area: Equity

"They [ACORN] have a proclivity for organizing the poorest of the poor. . . They really do struggle at the most desperate of situations, which is something that I always appreciated about them and a distinction that should be made." EXTERNAL PARTNER

Pushing for schools and the larger system to create the conditions for more equitable outcomes for students underlies all of the work of New York ACORN, and the quote above is one of many which demonstrate the degree to which politicians, school system officials,



EVIDENCE OF ACORN'S POWER INCLUDES WIDESPREAD RECOGNITION THAT ACORN REPRESENTS THE VOICES OF PARENTS AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS.

17

and school reformers recognize ACORN's commitment to equity. In this report we will discuss four measures of ACORN's accomplishments in the area of equity: *bringing new facilities and resources to low-income neighborhoods; obtaining policy changes to increase access to gifted and special admissions programs; raising public awareness and sustaining attention to inequitable conditions; and building political will for increasing equity in public schools.*

Bringing New Facilities and Resources to Low-income Neighborhoods

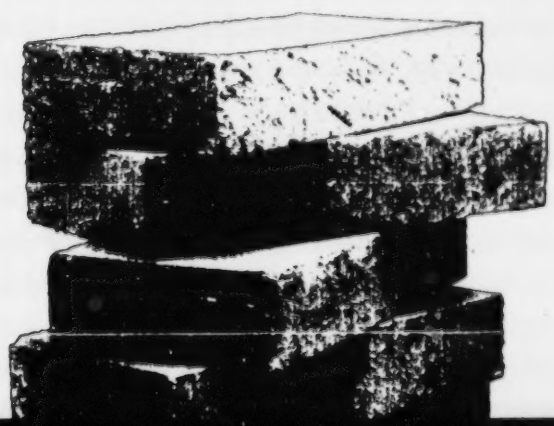
"This was a high school choice system . . . where kids were supposed to be able to choose from the over 200 schools in the city that are available outside of the zoned school. What was happening was that most ACORN members' kids would put down eight schools they wanted to attend and would be rejected by all of them and then told to go the zoned school, most of which were not doing terrific work with kids." FORMER ACORN SCHOOLS OFFICE STAFF MEMBER

In establishing schools, ACORN added options for students in neighborhoods where programs of high quality are generally lacking. The creation of PS245 not only brought new resources into Flatbush, but it also addressed overcrowding in the zone. ACORN Community High School and The High School for Social Justice provide sound alternatives for low-income parents and students in the Brooklyn's Crown Heights and Bushwick neighborhoods, which are mostly minority (African-American, Caribbean, Latino) and low-income. The Bread & Roses Integrated Arts High School in Washington Heights serves a largely Dominican population in upper Manhattan. In addition to the two new high schools in Brooklyn, ACORN is also working toward obtaining a commitment to open a high school in the Bronx and members have been looking for a space.

These schools not only add viable educational options in the neighborhoods where ACORN members live, but also bring new physical resources in the form of buildings, books, and adequate facilities. In order to establish these schools, ACORN parent leaders themselves had to find the buildings, push for renovations that support their educational vision, and keep an eye on renovations and equipment purchases to assure that promises were kept.

It is a challenge to find suitable buildings in New York's tight real estate market. ACORN members have insisted on including important features such as comfortable libraries, spaces for movement and exercise, and science labs. ACORN's role in the Bread and Roses Integrated Arts High School, for example, involved pushing the Board of Education for the facilities and equipment the school needed to carry out its arts and social justice theme. After parents went to Board of Education meetings and persisted in their demands, officials agreed to outfit a library and to change the computer order from Gateway to Macintosh, which saved money while getting the equipment necessary for the arts and graphic design components of the curriculum. The principal acknowledged that without ACORN's help, the school would not have won these battles.

The South Bronx School Improvement Campaign is also aimed at issues of equity, including bringing in new resources and increasing the access of low-income children to high-quality education. In calling for the formation of a South Bronx School Improvement Zone, ACORN pointed to the history of neglect of the South Bronx schools, which has resulted in their being among the lowest performing in the city. As the Bronx ACORN organizers and parent leaders told us, Bronx residents see their neighborhood as a neglected, forgotten part of the city with the worst schools and services. When test scores were released in 1998, parents saw just how poorly their schools were doing and that spurred the development of the Campaign. ACORN gained the



attention of the chancellor with the report *No Silver Bullet*, which documented the extent of neglect in the South Bronx schools and through rallies organized with the support of the Bronx ACORN office. As a result, the chancellor has met with ACORN leaders twice and has agreed to pilot the agenda laid out in *No Silver Bullet* in some fifteen schools in the three Bronx districts. While the pilot falls somewhat short of what the report asked for, it still has great potential to demonstrate the value of giving more resources and attention to these schools.

Obtaining Policy Change to Increase Access to Gifted and Magnet Programs

The three *Secret Apartheid* studies document in clear terms how, in the New York City school system, tracking starts in kindergarten (when children are most likely to be admitted to gifted programs) and continues all the way through to middle school (where there is limited availability of Regents-level math courses, which are necessary for success on admissions tests for the elite high schools). The result is pronounced under-representation of African-American and Latino students in gifted and magnet programs.

The *Secret Apartheid* reports are written in an accessible and direct way, with the aim of presenting information so that parents and community members can clearly understand the systemic nature of the problems they experience personally. The reports attracted abundant media attention, which may have had as great an impact through building public awareness of the inequities as through raising attention within the system. The media coverage included a *New York Times* editorial on newly appointed Chancellor Rudy Crew that was largely positive, but underscored the charges made in *Secret Apartheid* and called on the new chancellor for action.

Chancellor Crew did publicly acknowledge the reports' charges. However, his response was only a start in dealing with the issues, and ACORN had to be persistent in holding him and the board of education accountable for follow-through. In direct response to the first *Secret Apartheid* report, Chancellor Crew sought to take action on admissions practices for elementary-level gifted programs. He called for a system-wide survey of gifted programs (the first to be conducted in ten years), drafted new standards for admission for special kindergarten and other gifted programs, and promised to set up a task force to examine the effects of tracking.

The report also caught the attention of the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights Policies and resulted in a consent decree forcing the district to take action to reduce discriminatory practices related to informing parents of gifted programs. As a result of the consent decree, the Board signed an agreement committing itself to undertake three measures system-wide to provide information more consistently. Each school would designate someone knowledgeable about the school's gifted programs to handle parent inquiries, prominently post signs outlining academic programs in the school, and train security personnel regarding parents' right of access. In addition, the chancellor convened district superintendents to inform them about the new policies and required them to do a comprehensive survey of gifted programs in the schools in their districts. As ACORN characterizes these steps in the third report, these would be "concrete measures to democratize access to information about the schools and their programs."

One-year later, in *Secret Apartheid II*, ACORN followed up to see if the system was carrying out the newly mandated policies. The results of the follow-up were disappointing; there had been virtually no change from 1996 to 1997 in the way schools treated minority parents. Other commitments, such as creating a task force to examine tracking, were not honored either. Nonetheless, the district superintendents' surveys made school personnel aware of the de facto admissions policies and forced them to consider how these practices measured up in light of Office of Civil Rights standards for equitable access.

ACORN also succeeded in getting the Board to make public the information gathered in the system-wide survey of gifted programs. After the survey was completed, the chancellor initially refused to release the results, but ACORN, supported by a pro bono legal team, forced the district to do so. The Board's survey was incomplete because it failed to gather certain crucial information about the distribution of students by race and ethnicity, but the information collected did provide ACORN with a basis for the second *Secret Apartheid* report, which showed the disproportionately low representation of African-American and Latino children in gifted programs.

Furthermore, ACORN was able to put pressure on the Board by bringing a legal suit based on the premise that the federal monies for these programs were intended for reducing the isolation of minority children and their use in support of segregated programs violated the intent of the law.

As a result of the *Secret Apartheid* studies' drawing attention to the role magnet programs have in school segregation, the city comptroller agreed to consider an audit of New York City's use of federal funds designated for magnet programs—funds intended to further school integration. If the audit shows inequities, state legislators and city education officials will be under pressure to respond.

Also as a result of the *Secret Apartheid* studies and ACORN's organizing following those studies, the Board invested in curriculum and programs to increase access of minority students to gifted and special programs in the elementary and junior high schools and to special admissions high schools. *Secret Apartheid II* showed that minority students' middle school coursework did not prepare them for the entrance exams for the selective high schools or for the work they would be expected to do there. In response to this evidence, the chancellor expanded the Math and Science Institute, a program designed to help prepare students to take the tests for admission to one of the three premier high schools. This program was originally set up under Chancellor Fernandez only at a Manhattan location that enrolled 300 students. After the release of *Secret Apartheid II*, Chancellor Crew "bumped up" the program, investing $8 million dollars to locate a Math and Science Institute in every borough in the city and to increase enrollment to 2,000. One future measure of ACORN's impact on equity will be a follow-up on the rates of admission to the selective high schools from borough Institutes, the representation of different community school districts, and any changes in the racial/ethnic makeup of the selective schools.

Whether the expansion of the Math and Science Institute is considered directly attributable to ACORN's work or not depends on whom one talks to. For Chancellor Crew, equity was a priority item on his list, and that may account in part for his responsiveness to the *Secret Apartheid* studies. However, there is a clear relationship between the release of the report and Crew's actions. ACORN has kept the pressure on, holding him and the larger system accountable for carrying out their commitments. While the numbers of students affected are small, given the size of the New York City system, the Board's increased investment in equalizing access represents a significant advance.

Also as a result of the *Secret Apartheid* work, ACORN members began an effort to encourage the three special admissions high schools to expand access by working with the junior high schools in nearby low-income neighborhoods. ACORN members sought meetings with the principals of the three schools to encourage them to find ways to increase enrollment of neighborhood students. Two of the special admissions schools were unresponsive, but ACORN members succeeded in meeting with the principal of Brooklyn Technical High School. The Brooklyn high schools superintendent agreed to set up a "corridor arrangement" between a number of neighborhood junior high schools and Brooklyn Tech that would increase the representation of low-income, minority students. It is too early to examine the results of Brooklyn Tech's efforts to work with nearby middle schools; however, an interim sign of progress might be an increase in the number of students taking advanced math in 8th grade.

Raising Public Awareness and Sustaining Attention to Inequities Over Time

The *Secret Apartheid* reports, along with *No Silver Bullet* and the ongoing South Bronx Campaign, have heightened community awareness of the widespread inequities within the New York City school system. As one of ACORN's outside partners told us, perhaps the most important outcome of the *Secret Apartheid* reports was to increase the awareness of low-income parents and students across the city that there are deeply entrenched inequalities. Parents learned that they have a right to information and to school programs with high expectations for their children's learning. By raising consciousness, ACORN builds the capacity and motivation of low- and moderate-income parents to fight for equity over the length of time it takes to make significant improvements. The head of the school system and the Central Board know that ACORN is not going away and will not turn away from these issues, although the pressure it applies may take different forms.

ACORN's actions also contribute to raising the awareness of regulatory agencies and of the public at large. ACORN's reports and campaigns, and resultant legal suits, have gained widespread media attention and have helped to place issues of equity in education higher on the public agenda over an extended period of time.

Building Political Will for Increasing Equity in Public Schools

One of the unique contributions of community organizing to increasing equity in the public schools is creating the political will for elected and school officials to take action. As mentioned above, equity was definitely on Chancellor Crew's agenda when he came to the New York City schools. However ACORN has played a crucial role in keeping public attention focused on issues of equity, both through its studies and through actions taken as a result of the studies. This has maintained pressure on the chancellor, on principals of the special admissions high schools, and on city and state officials to keep equity issues high on the agenda.

Many of the school improvements that ACORN members are asking for—smaller class size, reduction in overcrowding, new facilities—are dependent on increased city and state funding. This has led ACORN to seek ways to have an impact at higher levels of government. One strategy has been to organize and participate in consortia to bring attention to the problems of city schools and the fiscal requirements of addressing them. ACORN and its partners frame this work as an effort to "re-legitimize spending on public education." ACORN has been key in forming two coalitions, one citywide and one statewide, that have the goal of pushing fair funding for New York City schools and for public education in general. The Parent Organizing Consortium (POC) coordinates citywide campaigns, aimed both at the local and state levels, for class size reduction, school construction, qualified teachers, and pre-K programs.

The statewide coalition, The Alliance for Quality Education, is a year-old effort still being formalized to bring together organizations interested in school reform. A key aim of the Alliance is to push elected state officials to increase allocations for education and target them to poorly performing schools in low-income communities. The directors of Citizen Action (a statewide grassroots organization working for social and economic justice) and NY ACORN are co-chairs of the Alliance. Other members include the Parent Organizing Consortium, Northwest Bronx Community Clergy Coalition, two state teachers unions, the United Federation of Teachers in New York City, policy groups like NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy, the Fiscal Policy Institute, and the Community Aid Association.

The director of Citizen Action told us that ACORN's contribution to the statewide alliance stems from its track record on school reform in New York City.

"[ACORN brings to the coalition] a long history and track record on school reform in New York City. They have a good idea of what investments in education should be made, that is what is really going to make a difference. This is what they bring to the coalition...their experience working with schools of highest need gives them an understanding of what schools need." DIRECTOR, NEW YORK CITIZEN ACTION

She also noted that this was a strategic moment to push for fair funding, because there is widespread agreement that schools will need additional resources to met the new standards the state has set. To support her sense that "the timing was right," she cited a recent State Supreme Court decision favoring fiscal equity, implementation of new state learning standards by the Regents, and a surplus in the state budget. She noted, "The new standards create a policy and political opening. Students can't graduate unless they pass the tests, but schools don't have the resources to accomplish the goal and everyone knows it."

Second Indicator Area: Leadership Development

"The mission of the ACORN National Schools Office is to build a base of parent leaders with information, skills, and perspective necessary to recreate school systems to serve children rather than the interests of competing factions of adults." ACORN DOCUMENT: PROPOSAL FOR NATIONAL EDUCATION TRAINING INSTITUTE

ACORN organizers see all of their work—whether at the neighborhood level, working in the ACORN high schools, carrying out the policy studies, or conducting broader campaigns—as opportunities to develop leaders who in turn will forward the agenda. We have determined three measures of ACORN's work in the area of leadership development. ACORN *creates settings for leadership development* as members work to establish schools and participate with school staff in planning and decision-making. ACORN's *training provides parents and community members with extensive knowledge* about education, school improvement and power structures of the city and school board, and ACORN *members gain a growing sense that they can influence others and bring about change.*

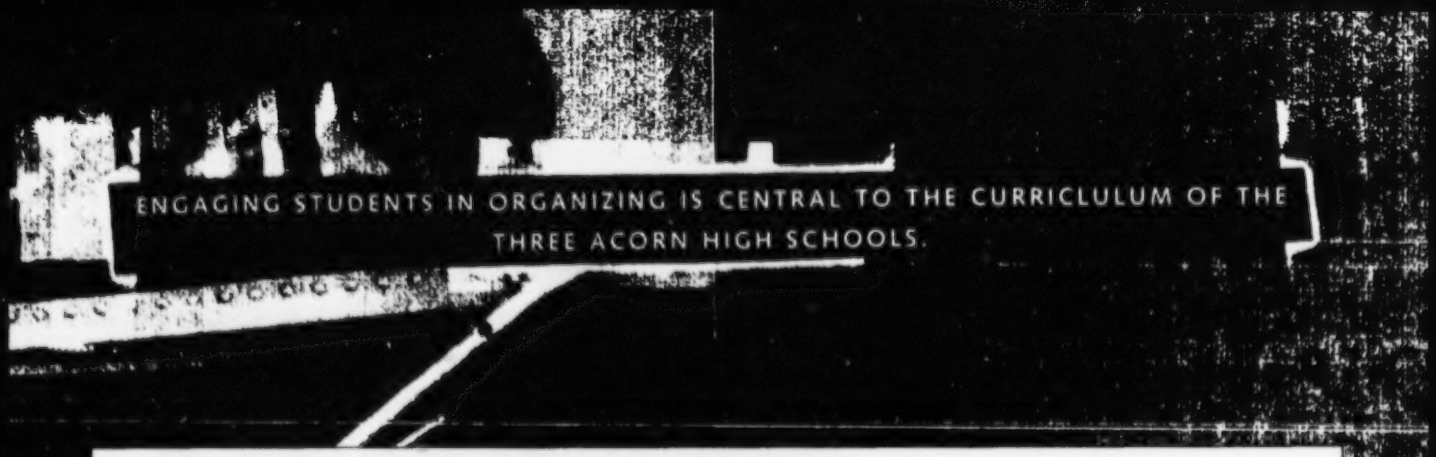
Creating Settings For Leadership Development

The work of establishing and partnering in ACORN schools creates opportunities for learning and leadership. Much of the activity that the ACORN organizers undertake in the schools involves students, parents, and teachers in understanding the sources of problems in the larger system and taking action to address them. Parents and students in ACORN schools participate in ACORN rallies, in leadership training, and in internships to learn about organizing; they also take lead roles in planning and carrying out campaigns.

The ACORN schools provide an important site for parents to learn leadership skills, as they participate in establishing the schools and on decision-making bodies within them. ACORN is committed to democratic governance within the schools; it sees one aspect of its role as a "partner" as making sure that parents and ACORN members participate with teachers in decision-making about hiring, curriculum, program structure, and spending.

ACORN actively recruits parents to participate on school committees. These include curriculum committees (including the Long Term Planning Committee recently formed to address curriculum and teaching) and the School Leadership Team (a mandated committee, made up of equal numbers of parents and school staff, which has authority over the budget and the yearly comprehensive education plan for a school). In schools where ACORN is a partner, ACORN staff and members of its citywide Education Committee have gained representation on the School Leadership Teams. ACORN's participation on these teams ensures that planning and budgeting take into consideration the requirements of the curricular theme that ACORN espouses. ACORN encourages parents on the School Leadership Teams to request quantitative information on student outcomes from the principal so that they can monitor student performance and use this information to guide their recommendations.

ACORN organizers also encourage parent and teacher participation in other school committees and organizations. Parents participate directly in hiring teachers; key criteria include candidates' commitment and ability to address ACORN's curricular priorities in their teaching. ACORN organizing helps to get out the vote for School Leadership Team elections, raises awareness of issues of importance, and trains parents in budgeting and curriculum so that they can participate fully in decision-making in the school. ACORN organizers also work with teachers to encourage their participation in the PTA and to make sure that they are fairly represented on the various committees.



One distinguishing aspect of ACORN's leadership development is its work with students. Engaging students in organizing is central to the curriculum of the three ACORN high schools. Students have investigated inequities in their own neighborhoods and have waged campaigns. For example, at ACORN Community High School, the students organized a campaign to get a bus stop restored in front of their school because of concerns about their safety in walking several blocks to the next one. They looked into how the decision to remove the bus stop had come about, then organized and staged rallies with support from the ACORN organizer at their school and others. They met with elected officials and representatives of the transit authority and eventually won back the bus stop. At another school, the students undertook a project to study environmental influences on asthma in their communities, with an eye to taking action once they had identified a clear target. At the ACORN High School for Social Justice, students participated in ACORN rallies and spent the summer as interns learning about organizing through experience.

ACORN Members Gain Knowledge and Skills Related to Education

ACORN's work with its members represents a significant investment in leadership development. Early on in its education work, ACORN organizers moved from a focus on encouraging parents to run in community school board elections to an emphasis on informing parents more broadly about education issues. ACORN recognized the importance of having a base of members who are knowledgeable about their rights in the public schools, have an idea what good schools look like, and know how they can work for school improvement. One area in which ACORN carries out leadership training and workshops is in understanding and formulating school budgets. Long after the Rockaway New School dissolved, the Far Rockaway superintendent began to contract with ACORN to work with parents because of its reputation for training parents to take leadership roles in the schools and fight for resources. Other community districts have also contracted with ACORN to train parents who will be on the School Leadership Teams.

ACORN Members Gain a Sense That They Can Influence Others and Bring About Change

With ACORN's assistance, parents and community members also gain sophistication about the power structures of the city and school system. Through their research and participation in campaigns involving face-to-face meetings with city and school officials, they gain an understanding of their rights and become strategic about how to articulate and win demands. Core groups of leaders, in turn, then organize other parents. For example, the ACORN members at the high schools see as part of their roles bringing along other parents, whether ACORN members or not, to understand their rights and entitlement to hold the school accountable.

Through involvement in the South Bronx Campaign, ACORN leaders also gained the experience and confidence to influence policies on a local level by organizing at individual schools. For example, some parents have worked to make Parent Teacher Association meetings more accessible for low-income parents, whose family and work obligations often prevented them from attending daytime meetings. As another example, parents influenced a principal to change his policy and allow children to wait inside the school in the early morning on cold days.

Third Indicator Area: Community Power

ACORN works to maintain a significant base of membership so that it can use the strategy of direct action when necessary, while at the same time leaders and organizers have built a network of influence with city officials and politicians that the organization can also tap for influence. ACORN uses these two strategies to build community power. Community power is important because it can move entrenched officials in a complicated and often politically constrained system.

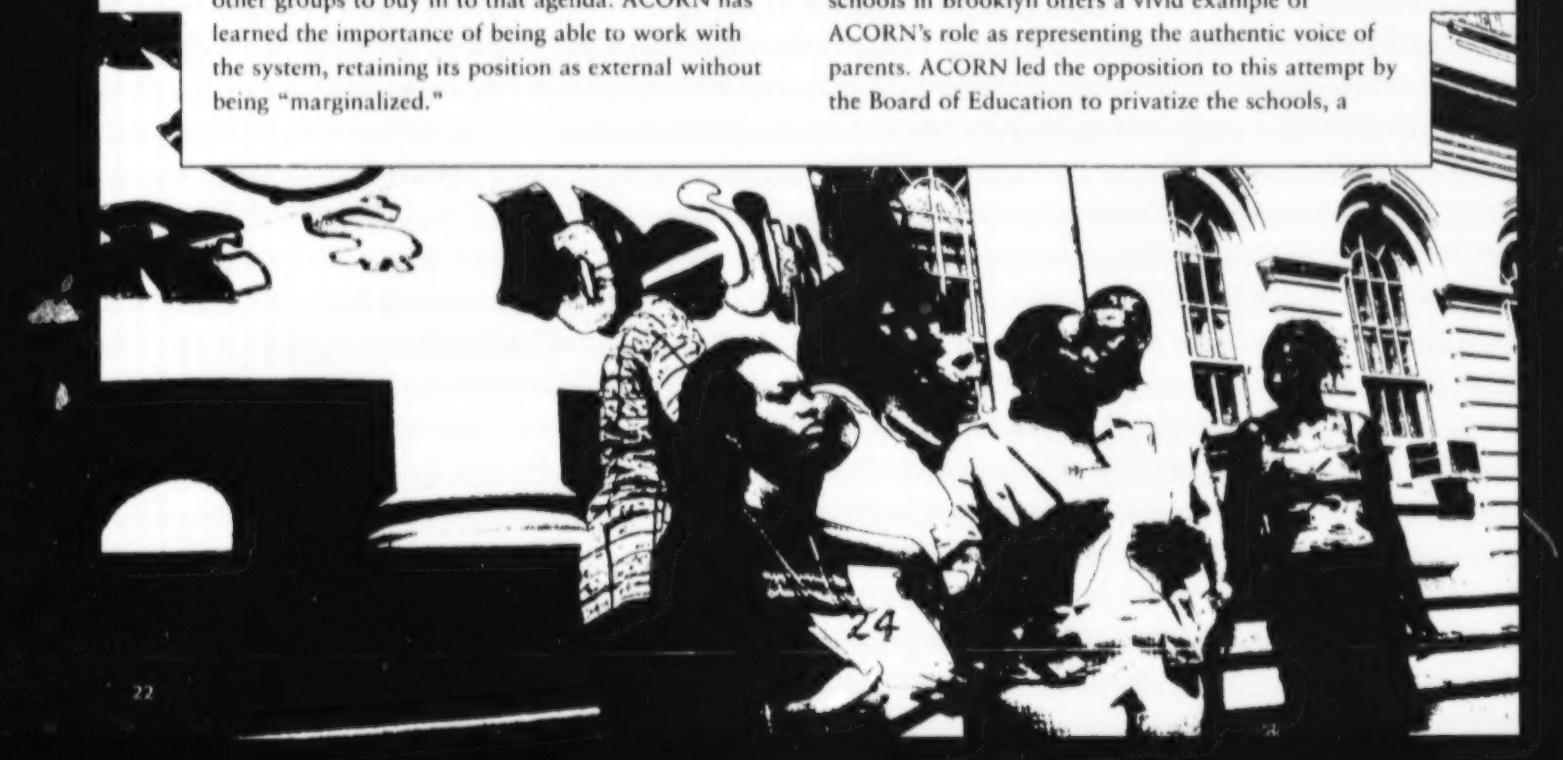
There are several ways to measure the power that ACORN has built in its neighborhoods and among its members. One measure is the widespread recognition that ACORN represents the authentic voices of low-income and working-class parents and has also established credentials with the reform community as having education expertise. This recognition has resulted in a responsiveness of public officials to ACORN demands. ACORN's influence makes it capable of cutting through bureaucracy to move plans forward or protect its schools from interference. In addition, ACORN has built power through partnerships and collaborations with other groups, including other organizing groups, the teachers' union, and strategically positioned non-profits. ACORN, representing the voices of low-income citizens, has won *"a seat at the table"* in education reform in New York City, so that it can *set the agenda for reform* and get other groups to buy in to that agenda. ACORN has learned the importance of being able to work with the system, retaining its position as external without being "marginalized."

ACORN Seen as Representing the Authentic Voice of Parents in the Schools

"We're creating the noise from the parents. You know, we're getting the attention drawn to it. All last year, we were doing constant [media appearances]....We were like New York One. We, at that point, were basically the official voice of parents." ACORN ORGANIZER REFERRING TO ACTIONS RELATED TO THE ANTI-EDISON CAMPAIGN.

While ACORN is certainly not the only group engaged in education organizing in New York City, it is among the most visible, and is generally acknowledged by the press, city officials, and school board as authentically representing a broad-based constituency of parents. For example, when ACORN was working in Far Rockaway, the superintendent at the time was engaged in a battle with his community board and saw ACORN as a group that could help him organize parents to become aware of corruption within the board. Now working with one of the four partners in the New York Networks for School Renewal, he explained that ACORN was an essential partner in the reform coalition because of its grassroots credentials.

More recently, the fight to prevent the for-profit Edison program from taking over five low-performing schools in Brooklyn offers a vivid example of ACORN's role as representing the authentic voice of parents. ACORN led the opposition to this attempt by the Board of Education to privatize the schools, a



change which under state law would require the support of a majority of parents. ACORN facilitated parent opposition by holding public meetings where the proposal could be debated, organizing parents to talk to other parents about their concerns, filing a lawsuit asserting that the initial voting process would be susceptible to fraud, and encouraging parents to participate in the vote. In the end, 80 percent of the parents voting opposed an Edison takeover; ACORN's role in the outcome was acknowledged in the press coverage of the events. As a result of this involvement, ACORN members are now in conversations to design and monitor improvement efforts at these schools.

Establishing Credentials with the Reform Community as Having Education Expertise

"And so these three high schools have been born and have been built to put schools in our neighborhoods. That has brought us [into] dealing with educators and the educational institutions head on. Then you begin to write intellectual reports about education, attending conferences and seminars...then you enter this other world and the educators want to talk to you." ACORN ORGANIZER

ACORN has gained a reputation as powerful not only by virtue of numbers of active members, but also because of its expertise in education and track record in establishing new schools. ACORN has garnered respect as an organization that not only raises issues, but also proposes solutions that are credible and drawn from its own experience in the trenches. ACORN staff members use the term "credentializing" to describe their efforts to be taken seriously by the Board of Education and by other school reform groups; these hard-won credentials have made ACORN a "player" in education reform in the city. One of the benefits of having credentials, according to an ACORN staff member, is that the organization can accomplish its goals not only through actions, or "going into the streets," but also through negotiation. "We know who to call; we have enough allies; we're not starting from ground zero."

ACORN's credentials as a powerful grassroots organization are paramount, and it would never abandon its direct action strategy. However, having credentials in working with the education system gives the organization alternative ways to access power. While some in the education reform community are reluctant to give ACORN full credit for its education expertise, they nonetheless acknowledge that ACORN's extensive work with schools and understanding of the bureaucracy distinguishes it among grassroots organizations. Its NYNSR partners give ACORN credit for working to maintain a relationship with its schools, which they see as the real challenge for a community-based organization. The head of Citizen Action, part of the statewide Alliance for School Quality, unequivocally sees ACORN as having strong education credentials. She emphasized that they have "concrete solutions" and "can identify what needs to be done." ACORN's achievements on multiple levels, from school-based work in local communities to system-wide policy work, has contributed to building ACORN's reputation, which increases the organization's power.

Responsiveness of Public Officials to ACORN Demands

The responsiveness of school and elected officials to ACORN's requests and recommendations is another measure of its power. Over the past several years, ACORN has been able to get the attention of the chancellor through political connections, public actions, or as a result of the charges raised in *Secret Apartheid* reports and widely publicized. Chancellor Crew's call for district superintendents to carry out the first comprehensive survey of gifted programs in the district in over ten years was in direct response to *Secret Apartheid I*. The city comptroller's interest in conducting an audit of federal funds for magnet programs is another example of public officials' responsiveness to ACORN's work.

In the past year, the Bronx Campaign brought a new level of responsiveness from the chancellor. In response to the release of *No Silver Bullet*, documenting the failure of schools in three South Bronx Districts, the new chancellor, Harold Levy, agreed to meet with ACORN to discuss the demands presented in the report. Looking for ways to build his own power as a new chancellor without the mayor's endorsement, Mr. Levy's responsiveness may reflect his view of ACORN as a group that represents a large base of community members. Whatever the reason, he met with ACORN leaders twice and agreed to

ACORN HAS "ACCESS" IN THAT IT IS ABLE TO GET THE ATTENTION OF THE CHANCELLOR AND OTHER HIGH LEVEL OFFICIALS AT THE CENTRAL BOARD AND CITY GOVERNMENT

introduce the reforms called for in *No Silver Bullet*—implementation of Success For All, smaller class sizes, staff development, and an extended day program—in fifteen South Bronx schools. In addition, he agreed to ACORN's request to open a new high school in the Bronx.

As one observer noted, ACORN has "access" in that it is able to get the attention of the chanceilor and the ears of other high level officials at the Central Board and in city government. It also draws on its store of "political capital," relationships with public officials with whom it has engaged in its other organizing work over the years, for such access.

Cutting Through the Bureaucracy

ACORN has shown itself able to use the power of community organizing to cut through bureaucracy to get things done. ACORN's ability to obtain a facility and other resources for the Bread & Roses High School provides an example of this kind of power. Bread & Roses actually came into the fold of new small high schools as part of the New York Networks for School Renewal process through New Visions. As the principal of Bread & Roses explained, once New Visions approved the school, "we thought we were home free." However, the Board offered little support in finding a space. "The bureaucracy had no way of assisting us, even though members of the bureaucracy had approved our plan." Despite the fact that Bread & Roses had the support of "a whole pantheon of people," staff was stymied in getting a school site. "We went to ACORN because we saw what they were doing in the community in terms of housing, in terms of working with people in the city who needed assistance in order to become powerful voices in their communities. And that's sort of what we wanted our school to do."

After a courtship between ACORN and the staff of Bread & Roses, with each meeting drawing more members, ACORN agreed to affiliate with the school and to assist in finding a space. The principal told the story of meeting with political figures, filling their offices with fifty people. "It was much more impressive, and we got a much different kind of response from these politicians." She described the meeting with the superintendent of Manhattan high schools, at which there were about 150 ACORN members present, as pivotal.

"...when we came to that meeting...there were a lot of ACORN members there. And they introduced themselves to him [the Manhattan high schools superintendent] and said, 'We represent ACORN, and ACORN represents 20,000 dues-paying members in New York City. And we want to speak for our membership. And two weeks later, we had the space. So the message that I take from that is that if there isn't organizational support amongst working people for something to happen, it doesn't happen. And it doesn't matter how many bureaucrats want it to happen or think it is a good idea to have it happen."

ACORN SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Bread & Roses case illustrates how community power can be invoked to create the political will that allowed the Central Board staff to take action.

In another instance involving the High School for Social Justice (SOJO), the school's association with ACORN provided protection from demands that would have threatened its development. When SOJO was assigned many more students than the school had planned for, the principal worried that he would have to increase class size the next year. He knew he could not refuse the district's decision, but he knew that if ACORN objected to the numbers, the district superintendent would respond. "I can't say to the Superintendent, 'I can't take 150 kids next year', but they can." The principal of SOJO came to see ACORN as an ally, explaining how ACORN "runs interference" with the superintendent, which " makes a big difference."

One of the New York Networks for School Renewal partners, in characterizing ACORN's accomplishments, described the role of community power in dealing with the chancellor and others in the school administration,

"So what they are able to do finally is that ACORN is capable of giving institutional protection to its babies. This is a very important issue, when you start schools that are 'strange' in a system, it is very important that you extend that protection. They are vulnerable; people will try to attack them. You have to create that institutional protection."

OUTSIDE PARTNER

Partnerships and Collaborations

ACORN has been instrumental in establishing partnerships that gain it clout by increasing the numbers of people represented, adding political capital, and complementing its own expertise and capacity. For the Bronx Campaign and the statewide Alliance, ACORN's partnership with the 80,000-member United Federation of Teachers (UFT) has been a deliberate strategy to strengthen its position. Collaboration with the union on the South Bronx Campaign is also critical to the campaign's ultimate success, since several of the proposed measures concern teaching and teacher recruitment. With the UFT and other unions as partners in the statewide coalition, grassroots and advocacy organizations not only benefit from the union's power of numbers, but also provide a model for an alliance of parents and community members with teachers.

In order to amplify community voices addressing issues of concern to parents and students across the city, ACORN worked to pull together the Parent Organizing Consortium (POC), which includes both large and small organizing groups in the city. One observer noted that, for the most part, POC members learned from each other and strengthened each other's work. "There is a lot of trust and they can deal with turf and money issues. ...They can be critical of each other, but it is within a 'house.'"

ACORN also strengthened its work by bringing in organizations with expertise in critical arenas. ACORN collaborated with the Education Trust and Fair Test in carrying out the work for *Secret Apartheid II*, which examined relationships between coursework and testing. It worked with NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy to carry out the analysis of the conditions of schools in the South Bronx and to develop the agenda for the South Bronx Campaign. The quality of this work reflects ACORN's strategic understanding of how to bring in collaborators to provide the expertise and polish necessary for its work to be taken seriously.

Winning a Seat at the Table

"...the politics of that [Annenberg Challenge grant] were incredible, and yet we hung on and stayed in there...with the usual big three suspects, because we understood that there is no way that kind of money, those kinds of resources, those kinds of education conversations were going to come into this city without us being at the table. If Annenberg is going to have a community aspect, ACORN is going to be it." ACORN ORGANIZER

As noted above, the original partners in the Annenberg-funded New York Networks for School Renewal recognized that they lacked community

credentials and invited ACORN in as the partner to provide them. Two of the partners reflected on ACORN's work over the past years and noted that it had become increasingly accepted as a significant education reform organization that offered an important dimension to school reform that other kinds of groups could not offer. One of the partners considered that having a seat at the table was a measure of ACORN's success, noting how easy it would be for a group like ACORN to be marginalized. She said, "Your success can be measured if you are not marginalized so that you have no impact other than an advocacy role, that you are actually able to influence programs. They [ACORN] were able to do that as an external agency. How well you are able to develop a collaborative relationship, not be marginalized, not be pushed to the point where all you are doing is raising your voice. They did figure out how to do this."

Setting the Agenda for Reform

"We aim to rewrite the rules for what constitutes reform in low performing schools. It can't just be done by imposing policies from above or just by teachers. It must be done by a real collaboration." ACORN ORGANIZER

The *Secret Apartheid* studies, the agenda of the Bronx School Improvement Campaign, the work of the Parent Organizing Consortium—all illustrate ways in which ACORN has influenced the agenda of school reform in New York City. As noted earlier, the chancellor responded to the charges in the three *Secret Apartheid* studies in several ways: calling for a survey of gifted programs, expanding the Math and Science Institute, and committing to setting up a task force on tracking. ACORN's continued attention to the issues raised in the studies kept the pressure on so that these issues remained on the agenda over time. It is indeed a significant challenge to keep the attention of a school system as complex as New York City's focused on a particular issue.

From its experience in establishing schools and in listening to the concerns of parents in local neighborhoods, ACORN understands the critical problems of the public schools and has carried out research and consulted others to determine what are the best solutions. While the *Secret Apartheid* studies focused on tracking and access to special programs, most of ACORN's citywide and statewide work at this point focuses on how to improve schools for all students through improving teacher and principal quality, reducing class size and relieving overcrowding in schools. These are the elements of the Bronx Campaign, and are also reflected in the agenda of the Parent Organizing Consortium.

ACORN has come to see that, in order for the New York Schools to enact these improvements, the heart of the matter is funding. Hence, the focus of both POC and the statewide Alliance ultimately comes down to increasing funding. Both an ACORN organizer and the director of the Parent Organizing Consortium used the same language in describing their driving focus as "re-legitimizing spending on public education." The Director of NY Citizen Action noted that one measure of an organization's strength is its ability to set the agenda. As she notes, ACORN has been able to "shape the agenda" in New York City. "They have shaped the chancellor's and others' opinion of what would be effective, other groups want to work with them, and they have been able to pull up other groups because of their reputation."

Fourth Indicator Area: High Quality Instruction and Curriculum

ACORN's work in education organizing has developed a variety of strategies for improving student learning through improving teaching and providing relevant and challenging curriculum. ACORN's work can be measured by the degree to which it brings attention to and addresses issues of improving teacher quality. By establishing small autonomous schools, ACORN's work has had the effect of increasing the relevance of curriculum. The Bronx School Improvement Campaign has also focused attention on reading and literacy, resulting in a pilot of the Success for All reading program in fifteen schools.

Improving Teacher Quality

In *No Silver Bullet*, ACORN points to research on teacher professional development and effective practices in New York's District 2 and the Chancellor's District and seeks to use these as models for the South Bronx schools. The report calls for incentives to recruit more experienced and highly-skilled teachers and principals to failing schools and to support them once hired. ACORN has also focused the agenda of

citywide and statewide efforts on professional development and teacher recruitment strategies to increase the quality of the teaching force for low-income and racially/ethnically isolated schools.

Discussions in the ACORN high schools' Long-Term Planning Committees likewise have led to measures designed to support teacher professional development and student learning. These measures include: staff development days for which teachers themselves developed the themes; grade-level collaboration resulting in adaptation of the community organizing theme for each high school year; and structural changes that support teacher collaboration and joint planning, strengthened relationships between students and teachers, and team teaching and interdisciplinary planning.

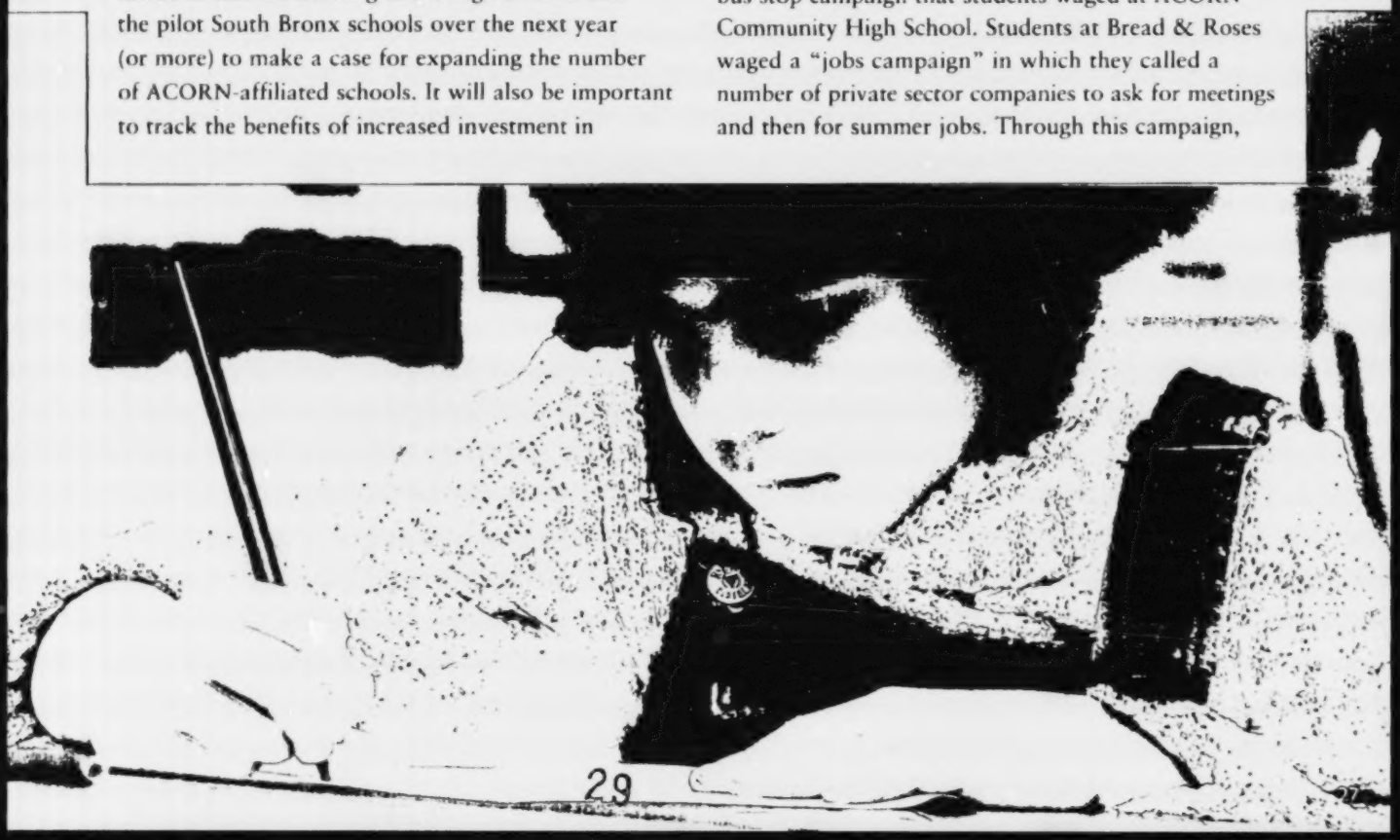
ACORN also obtained professional development support for teachers in ACORN Community High School and the High School for Social Justice through the New Educators Support Team (NEST), a program of New York Networks for School Renewal. This program brings a master teacher into the school on a regular basis to work one-on-one with teachers and to facilitate larger staff development sessions.

It will be important to track the measures of improvements in student learning in the high schools and the pilot South Bronx schools over the next year (or more) to make a case for expanding the number of ACORN-affiliated schools. It will also be important to track the benefits of increased investment in professional development, as well as the expansion of effective strategies for professional development.

Creating Schools with Relevant Curriculum that Connects to Students' Lives and Communities

Following from its aim of building community power and its commitment to social justice, ACORN has developed materials and structures to help ACORN schools realize the theme of "organizing for social change and social justice" throughout the curriculum. At the request of school staff, ACORN established and leads a Long-Term Planning Committee in each of the three high schools to bring school constituencies together in a formal dialogue about implementing the theme throughout the curriculum, and they have developed a staged approach to introducing concepts and practices of social justice across the grades.

Through ACORN Clubs and other forums, ACORN has also worked directly with students on carrying out research and direct action on issues of relevance to them. Through these activities, students find out about their communities, gain practice in analyzing the roles of public and private sector institutions in their lives, and learn about practices of community organizing and leadership. Mentioned earlier was the bus stop campaign that students waged at ACORN Community High School. Students at Bread & Roses waged a "jobs campaign" in which they called a number of private sector companies to ask for meetings and then for summer jobs. Through this campaign,



they learned about career ladders, issues of access to jobs in the private sector, and how to approach companies; they also obtained some commitments.

Student organizing at Bread & Roses also focused on environmental racism, as students looked at the incidence of asthma in their neighborhoods and explored the environmental causes of asthma in light of conditions in their Washington Heights community. At the High School for Social Justice, students met to discuss their participation in an upcoming rally on predatory lending. With some parents joining in, they learned about unfair lending practices that threatened the economic health of their neighborhoods. These examples demonstrate a unique feature of ACORN's education organizing related to its work at the high school level—encouraging and facilitating students' learning through their participation in organizing and direct action.

Focus on Improving Reading Achievement

Through careful analysis of data in its *No Silver Bullet* report and through the South Bronx School Improvement Campaign, ACORN has brought attention to the dismal reading achievement of students in these local districts. The report calls for the public schools to focus resources on improving reading, and recommends the research-based reading skill development approach, Success For All, along with professional support to implement it. It will be important for ACORN to track the implementation and achievement outcomes of Success for All in the first fifteen schools, in order to make a case for expanding or adapting the approach if it is effective. In making the Bronx School Improvement Agenda comprehensive, ACORN wisely recognized the need to provide a spectrum of supports to schools in addition to a structured curriculum, so that teachers ultimately have the skills and professional community to go beyond Success for All in improving the literacy skills of their students.

Future Directions

As this report illustrates, ACORN has many accomplishments resulting from its school reform organizing. ACORN organizers and leaders agree, however, that their strategies must constantly adapt to the shifting political and economic landscape and to turnover of system staff. Strategy also evolves as ACORN learns from its own experience about what it takes to stay involved in schools, to keep members engaged, to have sufficient depth and scale of impact, among other challenges. In other words, the education organizing strategy is really a work in progress. As a result, ACORN organizers are continually reflecting on and revising their strategy and the balance among the different levels at which they work.

Future directions must respond to a series of challenges that ACORN has identified, which fall into two broad categories. One set of challenges clusters around the effort to bring about policy change and reform at the system level. These include the need to connect the various levels at which ACORN works, to build and sustain a committed membership base, to have an impact at a sufficient scale to make a difference for large numbers of community members, and to address issues of teaching and learning. A major question in this area is how ACORN can balance the *scale* of impact with the *immediacy* of impact. This issue involves tradeoffs which have implications for maintaining ACORN's membership base. The question of how ACORN can best use its important alliances, particularly with the teachers union, is also significant in relation to ACORN's impact at the policy level and at a large scale.

Another set of challenges clusters around realizing the vision for the ACORN schools. Here, challenges include, getting at issues of teaching and learning, having responsibility for the success of the schools while not necessarily having sufficient influence on the program and approach, and making the schools truly democratically run to reflect the values and approach of community organizing for social justice. The main question here is, what does it mean to be a partner in a school and what would the work of organizing at the ACORN schools need to look like to support the organization's vision?

Reforming Public Education on a Large Scale

As this report makes clear, ACORN works on multiple levels at once – from the policy level citywide and statewide to the local school level in neighborhoods where ACORN members raise concerns about their schools. ACORN sees a need to connect its work at the various levels, if it is to succeed both in increasing its impact and also broadening its membership base. For an organization that is based in its membership, continued momentum is important to sustain experienced members and increase the membership base. Working at the neighborhood level, ACORN members can become energized when they take on issues such as safety or bilingual education at a single school, but working school by school is labor intensive and ultimately diffuses members' energy.

With this in mind, ACORN organizers and leaders hope to find a balance between the immediacy of organizing at the neighborhood level, which attracts members and keeps them engaged, and organizing on a broader policy level, which is necessary for meaningful impact. They see a need for "intermediate structures" to bridge the gap between the very broad scale organizing represented by the statewide coalition and the more narrowly focused organizing entailed in working school by school. They plan to build on the model of the South Bronx Campaign or the campaign that led to the defeat of the Edison Schools bid. Preventing Edison from taking over five schools energized the membership base and led to ACORN's further involvement in monitoring and improving those schools.

The "intermediate structure" model means working with five to ten schools in a defined neighborhood in what ACORN organizers refer to as a "broad based campaign at the neighborhood level to force changes and bring resources into several schools at once." They believe that by working at this intermediate level, they can leverage their credibility on citywide issues, along with their base at the neighborhood level, to impact policy more broadly. ACORN organizers next will put this strategy in place in East Brooklyn, where work has already begun.

ACORN organizers also see their partnerships with the United Federation of Teachers (UFT) and key political figures as key in these future campaigns. While the cast of school system players has constantly changed, ACORN has been able to draw on its political capital, connections with powerful individuals with whom it has worked not only on education but on housing campaigns as well, and this has kept them in the game despite constant turnover. ACORN sees its partnership with the UFT as tremendously important to its having impact which is both meaningful and at a wide scale, since the union's reach is system-wide and any effort to effect change either at the classroom level or in terms of teacher recruitment and placement needs the union's blessing to succeed.

Realizing the Vision for ACORN Schools

ACORN's work in creating schools does not end when the doors open to the first student, but continues as ACORN seeks to refine its role, adapt its organizing strategy, and, at the same time, translate the vision of its neighborhood organizing into the school setting. ACORN recognizes that the partnership role presents several challenges. While the schools are "autonomous," in the sense that they have their own administration, staff, building, and curricular focus, the schools are still part of and therefore subject to many of the pressures and regulations of the New York City school system. The administrator has the dual, and sometimes conflicting, task of meeting the needs of both the community partner and school board officials above him or her in the hierarchy. In this structural context, ACORN must forge a role and working relationship with school staff that supports the school and at the same time assures that the program reflects ACORN's vision—a truly democratic setting and a challenging academic program in which social justice is fully integrated into students' learning experiences. Despite the structural factors that limit ACORN's control over what happens in the school, ACORN is held accountable for the schools' outcomes in the court of public opinion.

The school level organizing is intensive and ACORN has assigned to each school an organizer whose task it is to work with all of the constituents—teachers, students, parents, and administrators. This is a very labor-intensive process that involves building buy in through one-on-ones, separate meetings with each group of constituents, and encouragement for different groups to work sensitively together. The organizers work behind the scenes to build a democratic culture by encouraging wide participation of parents and teachers on committees. As one of the

school organizers described it, her work is to "create a space where parents and teachers can build bridges." Organizers measure their impact by the degree to which communication is occurring between teachers and parents, the number of teachers who come to PTA meetings, and evidence of parents and teachers working together for common purposes. They also measure their success by the principal's receptivity to the ideas of parents and teachers.

In addition to building a democratic culture within ACORN schools, the organizers and leaders hope to build networks across the ACORN schools. When a strong community leader from the South Bronx attended a Bread and Roses PTA meeting, for example, she was able to put the problems parents and staff were discussing into perspective, and this helped them move forward. ACORN sees these networks as a way to build social capital among parents from all three schools, as they ask each other how they can work together to hold schools accountable.

Organizing in schools has required ACORN to adapt its organizing approach as it has refined its role as being both insider and outsider in the school context. As one of the school organizers framed the challenge, "The external policy work comes easier to the organizing; it is easier to polarize issues, find a real target and shape a campaign. It is harder where you are both sitting at the table and trying to work for change externally." The school organizers described the tensions parents feel in being both outside (holding schools accountable) and inside (having a seat at the decision-making table); they see their own responsibility as helping parents figure out how to be powerful in both roles. The job of organizing in schools builds on ACORN's considerable expertise, but also requires innovation. ACORN organizers are developing approaches for working with principals and for creating structures, processes, and values that assure students are learning at high levels at the same time as they are actively engaged in their learning both inside and outside the classroom.

The Challenge of New York City's Financial Crisis in the Aftermath of 9/11

New York ACORN faces the significant challenge of figuring out how to operate in the context of recent terrorist events and a new mayoral administration. ACORN has committed itself to continue working for democratic ideals, seeing its mission as even more important in light of recent events. The ACORN website has a message about the organization's reaction to 9/11 from ACORN president Maude Hurd, who states that she mourns the loss of ACORN's own members in the tragedy and calls on ACORN members across the country to renew their commitments.

"ACORN members, like other Americans, are pulling together all over the country in our resolve to continue to show America as the democracy it is. On the same day as this tragedy, ACORN members all over the country were involved in working to help elect candidates responsive to the working families of America. We will continue to work to keep our democracy strong while supporting each other and our communities at this time of grief."

Nonetheless, both the city and state will shoulder enormous expenses to repair damage, and the city faces severe budget deficits stemming from the loss of jobs and businesses. The challenge of this turn of events to groups pushing for education reform cannot be underestimated; even in the era of economic well-being during the boom years of the 1990s, organizing groups and education advocates had to do battle for increases and equity in education spending. Further, the new city administration favors a new governance arrangement with strong mayoral control, which has implications for Chancellor Levy's tenure. It will likely be more difficult now to get the attention of high level school officials, given their pre-occupation with deficits and the dislocated schools in Lower Manhattan. As the website message indicates, however, ACORN intends to continue as before, seeing its work in strengthening democracy and bringing about more equitable conditions as more important than ever.

Appendix A

Definitions of the Indicator Areas

Leadership Development builds the knowledge and skills of parents and community members (and sometimes teachers, principals, and students) to create agendas for school improvement. Leadership development is personally empowering, as parents and community members take on public roles. Leaders heighten their civic participation and sharpen their skills in leading meetings, interviewing public officials, representing the community at public events and with the media, and negotiating with those in power.

Community Power means that residents of low-income neighborhoods gain influence to win the resources and policy changes needed to improve their schools and neighborhoods. Community power emerges when groups act strategically and collectively. Powerful community groups build a large base of constituents, form partnerships for legitimacy and expertise, and have the clout to draw the attention of political leaders and the media to their agenda.

Social Capital refers to networks of mutual obligation and trust, both interpersonal and inter-group, that can be activated to leverage resources to address community concerns. Some groups call this "relational" power, while others describe this process as one of building "political capital." Beginning with relationships among neighborhood residents and within local institutions, community organizing groups bring together people who might not otherwise associate with each other, either because of cultural and language barriers (e.g. Latinos, African-Americans, and Asian-Americans) or because of their different roles and positions, such as teachers, school board members, and parents. Creating settings for these "bridging relationships" in which issues are publicly discussed is the key to moving a change agenda forward.

Public Accountability entails a broad acknowledgement of and commitment to solving the problems of public education. It is built on the assumption that public education is a collective responsibility. Community organizing groups work to create public settings for differently positioned school stakeholders—educators, parents, community members, elected and other public officials, the private and non-profit sectors, and students themselves—to identify problems and develop solutions for improving schools in low- to moderate-income communities. Through this public process, community organizing groups hold officials accountable to respond to the needs of low- to moderate-income communities.

Equity guarantees that all children, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or ethnicity, have the resources and opportunities they need to become strong learners, to achieve in school, and to succeed in the work world. Often, providing equitable opportunities requires more than equalizing the distribution of resources. Community organizing groups push for resource allocation that takes into account poverty and neglect, so that schools in low-income areas receive priority. In addition, groups work to increase the access of students from these schools to strong academic programs.

School/Community Connection requires that schools become institutions that work with parents and the community to educate children. Such institutional change requires that professionals value the skills and knowledge of community members. In this model, parents and local residents serve as resources for schools and schools extend their missions to become community centers offering the educational, social service, and recreational programs local residents need and desire.

High Quality Instruction and Curriculum indicate classroom practices that provide challenging learning opportunities that also reflect the values and goals of parents and the community. Community organizing groups work to create high expectations for all children and to provide professional development for teachers to explore new ideas, which may include drawing on the local community's culture and involving parents as active partners in their children's education.

Positive School Climate is a basic requirement for teaching and learning. It is one in which teachers feel they know their students and families well, and in which there is mutual respect and pride in the school. Community organizing groups often begin their organizing for school improvement by addressing safety in and around the school and the need for improved facilities. Reducing school and class size is another way in which community organizing groups seek to create positive school climates.

Appendix B

Indicators Project National Advisory Group

Henry Allen[II]
HYAMS FOUNDATION

Drew Astolfi[II]

Leah Meyer Austin[II]
W.K. KELLOGG FOUNDATION

Joseph Colletti[II]
UNITED FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

Oralia Garza de Cortes[I,II]
INDUSTRIAL AREAS FOUNDATION

Cyrus Driver[II]
FORD FOUNDATION

Fred Frelow[II]
ROCKEFELLER FOUNDATION

Zoe Gillett[I]
CHARLES STEWART MOTT FOUNDATION

Paul Heckman[I,II]
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Tammy Johnson[II]
APPLIED RESEARCH CENTER

Steve Kest[I,II]
ACORN

Pauline Lipman[II]
DEPAUL UNIVERSITY

Gabriel Medel[I]
PARENTS FOR UNITY

Hayes Mizell [I,II]
EDNA MCCONNELL CLARK FOUNDATION

Janice Petrovich[I]
FORD FOUNDATION

Amanda Rivera[II]
AMES MIDDLE SCHOOL

Gary Rodwell[I]

Lucy Ruiz [I,II]
ALLIANCE ORGANIZING PROJECT

Minerva Camarena Skeith[II]
AUSTIN INTERFAITH

Rochelle Nichols Solomon[I,II]

Cross City Campaign Staff

Chris Brown

Anne C. Hallett

Lupe Prieto

Research for Action Staff

Eva Gold

Elaine Simon

[I] Phase one Advisory Group member
[II] Phase two Advisory Group member

Leadership Development

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Identify and train parents and community members (and sometimes teachers, principals, and students) to take on leadership roles	
• Recruit and support neighborhood residents, ACORN high school parents and students as leaders in ACORN campaigns and in the schools • Encourage strong leaders, in turn, to identify and develop other community members as leaders • Design and implement formal training sessions on education issues (e.g., local institutes, national education conferences) for parent leaders • Support parents and community members in meeting with elected officials, school officials, etc. • Develop structures and opportunities for parents and students to take leadership roles (e.g., ACORN high school planning committees, PTA revitalized by ACORN members at local elementary schools, leaders instruct ACORN members at other ACORN sites nationally)	• Parents, community members, students, and school staff gain increased understanding of the structure of power in the city and in the School Board • ACORN members, ACORN high school students, and teachers take lead roles in planning and carrying out campaigns • Increasing numbers of parents at ACORN high schools become ACORN members or participate in actions • Parents and students gain greater understanding of local education issues and effective change strategies • School staff perceive decision-making bodies with parent and student members as powerful and critical to school operations
2 Develop parents (and community members, teachers, principals, and students) as politically engaged citizens	
• Develop leadership skills of parents, teachers, students, and community members (e.g., through public speaking, research, negotiation, reflection, and evaluation • Enlist students, ACORN parents, and teachers to participate in ACORN actions on issues such as predatory lending, increased public school funding, jobs campaign, etc. • Form ACORN student after-school clubs with teachers at the high schools to identify concerns, develop campaigns, etc. • Support students, ACORN high school and S. Bronx parents, and teachers in actions regarding demands for their own schools, such as improved facilities, lower class size, etc.	• Parents, community members, students, and school staff use their knowledge of the structure of power in the city and School Board to inform their planning strategies and school/ACORN partnerships • Members gain confidence in their ability to operate in the political arena (e.g., to articulate demands to politicians or highly placed school officials)
3 Promote individual, family, and community empowerment	
• Encourage parents and students to attend annual ACORN convention • Develop leadership skills through parents' and students' engagement in establishing high schools and decision-making about ongoing work of the high schools	• Parents, students, teachers perceive themselves as gaining knowledge, confidence and skills • Parents gain confidence in their expertise about education issues and school system operations • Parents, students, and school staff demonstrate increasing skill in organizing and confidence in their leadership capacity • ACORN learns and is recognized for knowing "what it takes" to make a school work

DATA SOURCES

- Observations at ACORN high schools/shadowing organizers and ACORN leaders
- ACORN membership records
- Interviews/surveys of parents, students, school staff members
- Interviews and/or surveys of school staff, school system officials, public officials, education reform figures

STRATEGIES reflect actual work of the group.

RESULTS include actual outcomes that we identified and outcomes that the group expects.

DATA SOURCES point to ways to document both actual and expected results.

Community Power

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Create a mass base constituency within communities that results in deep membership commitment and large turnout	
• Build membership base within and across low-income neighborhoods (ACORN members are in 16 of 32 local school districts in NYC) • Use ACORN schools as a vehicle to recruit ACORN members from among parents • Draw on base of 20,000 New York ACORN members involved in multiple issues (e.g., housing, predatory lending)	• Public officials, other education reform groups see ACORN as speaking for parents in the most impoverished African-American and Latino communities (e.g., role in Edison schools decision) • ACORN is considered a vital participant in education reform efforts at the highest levels (e.g., New York Networks for School Renewal • Public officials and others respond to ACORN's requests/ perceive ACORN members as powerful actors
2 Form partnerships for legitimacy and expertise	
• Form and retain relationships with powerful people and organizations over an eighteen-year period of organizing • Participate as a partner in the Annenberg Challenge • Partner with the UFT and NYU's Institute for Education and Social Policy in the S. Bronx Campaign • Form state-wide coalition (Alliance for Quality Education) • Form city-wide coalition of organizing groups (Parents Organizing Consortium) • Partner with NYC schools through the ACORN high schools to gain first hand experience of "what it takes to run a school"	• Public officials, teachers' unions, other education reform groups recognize ACORN as having a track record/legitimacy in the field of education • Public officials and others willing to support ACORN's efforts/campaigns • Other education reform groups see ACORN as an important partner representing a grassroots constituency
3 Create a strong organizational identity	
• Organize assemblies at ACORN high schools to explain and illustrate ACORN and its education work • Inform parents, students, and teachers about ACORN's history, its work and its successes • Develop accounts of ACORN's work (e.g., clippings packages) • Establish NY ACORN Schools Office, and persist in shaping a meaningful role for ACORN in its high schools • Work at multiple levels, including local school, district-wide, city-wide, and state-wide • Draw media attention to ACORN's agenda and work	• Media attention for issues raised in reports/studies • Chancellor responds to charges lodged through reports and studies (e.g., issues directives, makes data public) • The Alliance for Quality Education draws attention of legislators and the media to resource issues related to using Regents standards across all New York schools • Legislative deliberations include consideration of increase in state funding • ACORN has a seat at the table
4 Draw political attention to organization's agenda	
• Create citywide and statewide coalitions that target elected officials with a call for increased spending on public education, with the goals of: reducing class size; increasing teacher professional development; hiring high quality teachers • Study and issue reports that receive wide media attention and are accessible to the general public on inequities within the New York school system	• Students and staff in ACORN high schools know mission and purpose of partnership • Students, teachers, parents, and administrators perceive ACORN as a powerful organization, able to support them in reaching goals and obtaining resources.
DATA SOURCES • Records of turnout at ACORN rallies and actions • Media coverage	• Interviews with Chancellor, local school district superintendents, union officials, other public officials, education reform leaders • Interviews/surveys of parents, students, and community members

Social Capital

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1. Build networks	
• Create city-wide education committee of active parents who meet regularly and plan campaigns on issues of concern • Establish networks at neighborhood, city-wide, and national levels through education committees, education reform training • Establish and participate in the Parent Organizing Consortium • Co-found and participate in the Alliance for Quality Education	• Community members' relationships within neighborhoods increase and deepen • Parents and students in ACORN schools and in local neighborhoods perceive that they can count on larger ACORN membership for support and broader perspective • Increased recognition by ACORN members that they are learning from and supported by members of other organizing groups
2. Build relationships of mutual trust and reciprocity	
• Support school staff (teachers and administrators) in obtaining resources and protecting integrity of programs • Develop and promote opportunities for parent participation in school decision-making (e.g., school leadership teams, long-term planning committees)	• Increased perception of mutual support between teachers/school staff and parents/students • Increased interaction among school staff, parents, and students to address school issues and needs
3. Increase participation in civic life	
• Promote student participation in organizing campaigns around issues such as asthma, jobs, bus stop campaigns • Establish ACORN internship for high school students who participate in voter registration drives • Involve teachers and parents in taking action to improve local schools (e.g., meeting with officials, leading rallies) • ACORN members run for local school board positions and lobby elected school board officials	• Increased participation of youth in voluntary activities and institutions in their communities (e.g., actions, clubs, church) • Greater youth awareness of election campaigns and candidates' positions • Greater parent awareness of and involvement in political arena
DATA SOURCES	
• Interviews/surveys of parents, school staff, students	• Observations of meetings/conferences/shadowing organizers

Public Accountability

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Create a public conversation about public education and student achievement	
• Release *Secret Apartheid* reports that document academic inequities; make sure that reports are accessible and get wide distribution • Call for inventory (system-wide survey) of gifted programs • Take legal action to require information to be released to public • Release of *No Silver Bullet* report documenting: 1) low student achievement levels in S. Bronx schools; 2) inequities in resources available relative to school system as a whole • Force school board to make information (e.g., results of survey of the system's gifted/magnet programs) accessible to the public • Foster democratic culture at ACORN high schools (i.e., parents, students, and teachers all have a voice on decision-making bodies)	• News media coverage of school district inequities and editorials supporting ACORN's calls for action • Parents gain increased awareness of inequities and of resources and facilities to which their schools are entitled • Parents stimulate discussion about academic inequities in meetings with Chancellor or other board and political officials • Teachers, students, parents, and administrators exchange information about ACORN high schools' programming and progress
2 Monitor programs and policies	
• Conduct follow-up studies to show whether or not the school board met promises (e.g., making information available on magnet/special programs, offering regents level coursework • Seek face-to-face meetings with chancellor and other district and elected officials to present findings and demand action • Bring legal action to force compliance with federal civil rights laws/use of federal funds to reduce racial isolation	• Independent audit conducted of system's use of federal funds designated for magnet programs, with the goal of holding School Board accountable to make programs more accessible or ensure that programs serve more minority/ low-income students • Chancellor/local district officials recognize needs and carry out commitments
3 Participate in the political arena	
• Form state-wide coalition with groups that have similar interests to lobby legislators for resources and funding equity in light of newly set standards • Form alliances with local elected officials, including local school board members • Bring spending practices to the attention of the City Controller to examine appropriate use of funds (audit of use of federal desegregation funds for magnet programs) • Work with youth around voter registration/ neighborhood issues (e.g., environmental concerns, bus stop campaign)	• Public officials and state legislators recognize significance of issues raised by coalition and seek to act on these in determining funding formulas • Public officials are responsive to ACORN interests/positions • Increased accountability of School Board on uses of federal funds for reducing racial isolation
4 Creating joint ownership/relational culture	
• Create participation structures that bring parents, students, and school staff together in ACORN high schools on school leadership teams, hiring committees, etc. • Support school staff in getting needed resources and facilities for the ACORN schools (e.g., physical improvements, teaching resources, maintenance of small class and school size)	• School staff see school and community as interdependent/ mutually supportive, and school staff call on community/ ACORN to support school needs • Parents perceive ACORN high school teachers as more responsive to them and their children than teachers in other schools
DATA SOURCES • News archives/clippings • Interviews with chancellor/public officials	• Interviews/surveys of parents in low-income African-American and Latino neighborhoods • Observation of meetings

Equity

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1. Increase funding and resources to under-resourced schools	

• Campaign to increase funds for S. Bronx schools (e.g., for teacher professional development, teacher and principal recruitment, enriched reading curriculum)
  ◦ Issue report, *No Silver Bullet*, documenting inequities and detailing recommendations
  ◦ Meet with chancellor to deliver demands
  ◦ Stage public actions to underscore issues and demands
• Form city-wide and state-wide coalitions to call attention to inequitable funding (Parent Organizing Consortium, a city-wide coalition of parent organizing groups, and Alliance for Quality Education, a state-wide coalition of groups fighting for increased funding for public school improvement)
	• Chancellor identifies a group of S. Bronx schools (15) to pilot new reading program, professional development programs, teacher recruitment effort
	• Greater number of credentialed, highly qualified teachers attracted to S. Bronx schools
	• State legislators consider/propose more equitable funding formulas

2. Maximize access of low-income children to educational opportunities	
• Establish autonomous high schools in neighborhoods with few high-quality options • Expose and sustain attention to the problem of unequal access through Secret Apartheid studies and follow-up research and action • Press for more open access to information about high quality educational alternatives (e.g., magnet programs, selective high schools, high-level math courses) • Take legal action to force compliance with requirements to deliver services equitably (e.g., information about gifted programs, use of federal dollars intended for desegregation) • Approach principals in selective high schools to work with ACORN in creating more opportunities for low-income, minority students	• Increased number of high school options for students in Brooklyn and Washington Heights neighborhoods • Larger number of students from minority and low-income neighborhood schools enrolled in New York's highly selective high schools • Policies enacted that provide for open information to African-American and Latino parents about magnet and special programs at the elementary and middle school levels • Greater overall number and diversity of participants in science magnet high schools prep programs
3. Match teaching and learning conditions with those in the best schools	
• Carry out studies (*Secret Apartheid* reports) to document the lack of courses that are essential to prepare students for Regents exams in schools with majority African-American and Latino populations • Document inequities in academic resources for S. Bronx schools (e.g., school leadership, teacher quality, class size, and curriculum (*No Silver Bullet* report) and call for bonuses to attract qualified principals and teachers, research-based reading curriculum, reduced class size, and extended day programs	• Chancellor identifies a group (15) of S. Bronx schools for a pilot project to implement new reading program, professional development programs, teacher recruitment effort • Increased number of qualified teachers and motivated principals apply to and are hired in S. Bronx schools • African-American and Latino-majority schools offer higher-level math and science courses
DATA SOURCES • Interviews with ACORN staff, Chancellor's office staff, S. Bronx school districts' staff • Observation in S. Bronx schools • Interviews and/or surveys of S. Bronx schools' staff • School district personnel records/hiring records	• Interviews and/or surveys of Brooklyn and Washington Heights community members • Registration records of ACORN schools • Enrollment records from feeder middle schools of students in selective high schools/science magnet high schools prep programs • Interviews and/or surveys of African-American and Latino parents of elementary/middle school students • Interviews/observation in elementary/middle schools

School/Community Connections

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Create multi-use school buildings	
• Identify and monitor renovation of buildings for ACORN high schools, which provide additional facilities for community use	• Community members, parents, and students perceive the school as a vital resource in their community • Increased use of the school building for community purposes
2 Position the community as a resource	
• ACORN supports schools to obtain needed resources and maintain program integrity (e.g., obtain buildings, demand appropriate computers, prevent over-assignment of students) • Establish precedent in ACORN high schools that parents contribute to writing a section of the school's comprehensive education plan detailing the roles of parents and community	• School staff place increased value on the partnership role of ACORN/community • Greater awareness of and attention to community issues on part of school staff • School staff place greater value on having a community-oriented focus at the school
3 Create multiple roles for parents in schools	
• Encourage and support parents' (and ACORN parent members') engagement in school decision-making committees (e.g., leadership teams, hiring committees) • Create structures that provide opportunities for parents to engage with staff in framing the academic program (e.g., the long-term planning committees of ACORN high schools)	• Parents' and/or students' roles in decision-making in the schools becomes increasingly significant • Parents and students work collaboratively with school staff on curriculum development and improving teaching and learning • Parents of ACORN high school students are active on school decision-making bodies
4 Create joint ownership of schools and school decision-making	
• Organize parents of children in ACORN high schools to support the school in pushing for resources, small size, waivers of requirements that contradict school goals • Form long-term planning committees at ACORN high schools that engage parents in curriculum development and joint professional development • Parents become partners in ACORN high schools and participate in establishing schools' mission statements	• Increased turnout of parents and teachers for PTA meetings • Parents are knowledgeable about academic, personnel, and school policy issues in ACORN high schools • Teachers are knowledgeable about neighborhood and community issues • Students perceive that teachers and administrators care about them and understand their communities/families • Greater numbers of parents and students participate in actions to gain or increase support for neighborhood schools or partner ACORN schools • Increasing numbers of teachers participate in ACORN education-related organized actions • Reduced turnover of ACORN high school teachers
DATA SOURCES	
• Interviews and/or surveys of parents, students, school staff • Observations in school and of meetings/activities/ shadow organizers	• Review documents (e.g., schools' comprehensive education plans, meeting minutes) • Meeting attendance and participation records

High Quality Instruction and Curriculum

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Identify learning needs, carry out research, and implement new teaching initiatives and structures	
• Campaign for implementation of reading/basic skills curriculum for S. Bronx schools, based on research conducted for *No Silver Bullet* report • Work with teaching staff to develop and implement social justice curricula at ACORN high schools • Facilitate ACORN Community High School student research and organizing on issues of immediate interest to their communities (e.g., police brutality, asthma epidemic, jobs) • Participate on committees to recruit and hire teachers who are willing to incorporate social justice curricula into their teaching	• Chancellor identifies schools in which to pilot new curriculum, in response to ACORN demands in *No Silver Bullet* • Teachers incorporate social justice issues into their curriculum • Students are more engaged in school and see school work as relevant
2 Enhance staff professionalism	
• Document need for and call for greater spending on professional development in S. Bronx schools (in *No Silver Bullet* report and S. Bronx Campaign) • Obtain grant for professional development for ACORN Community High School and the High School for Social Justice, through New Educators Support Team (a program of NY Networks for School Renewal) • Encourage teacher professional development through the long-term planning committees at ACORN high schools to support: teacher collaboration, team teaching, and strong relationships between teachers and students	• Increased spending on teacher professional development in pilot S. Bronx schools • Teachers more likely to perceive themselves as respected professionals • Teachers have increased sense of efficacy • Increased collaboration among teachers (e.g., joint curriculum planning; teaming) • More interaction about academic decision-making between school staff and students/community/parents • Students more likely to perceive teachers as caring (i.e., willing to spend time with them, concerned about their learning)
3 Make parents and community partners in children's education	
• Organize parents of students in ACORN High Schools to participate in decision-making, actions, etc. • Form curriculum and hiring committees in ACORN high schools that include organized parents • Establish long-term planning committees with parent participation at ACORN high schools to focus on teacher professional development and implementation of the social justice theme	• Increased interaction among students, parents, and teachers on curriculum and other academic matters • Parents and students perceive staff as more committed and responsive than teachers at previous schools • Teachers increasingly see the value of and gain commitment to implementing social justice theme through the curriculum
4 Hold high expectations	
• Demand curriculum in low-income/minority schools that meets Regents standards, through release of Secret Apartheid reports and follow-up actions • Through S. Bronx Campaign, demand that elementary schools adopt more effective reading and math curricula • Establish alternatives with curricula that are stronger than the curricula in the zoned high schools (e.g., Acorn Community High School, School for Social Justice)	• More Regents level courses in schools in low-income/minority neighborhoods • Programs enacted that increase access of low-income/minority students to selective high schools • Increased diversity (race/income/ethnicity) in New York City's magnet and special admissions programs • Success for All, higher level math curriculum implemented in pilot S. Bronx schools • Increased achievement, attendance, and graduation rates of students attending ACORN high schools
DATA SOURCES	
• Interviews and/or surveys of school system and local district officials, ACORN high school professional staff, ACORN high school students and parents	• Observations in ACORN high schools, pilot schools in S. Bronx • School system records on spending, school demographic characteristics, courses offered

Positive School Climate

STRATEGIES	RESULTS
1 Improve facilities	
• Find buildings for autonomous high schools in low-income/ minority neighborhoods and monitor renovation • Organize to get empty lots around schools cleaned up through the Neighborhood Partners Initiative (S. Bronx)	• ACORN school facilities for autonomous schools are well-equipped and attractive • School staff feel that working environment has improved
2 Improve safety in and around the school	
• Organize parents to address safety issues in S. Bronx schools (e.g., create "speed bumps" on street in front of school, increase police patrol before and after school) • Facilitate student campaign to restore bus stop in front of ACORN Community High School	• Fewer incidents in and around schools and on the trip to and from school • Students have a sense of ownership about the school and value the building and the staff
3 Create respectful school environment	
• Campaign through documentation, actions and meetings to assure equal dissemination of information about magnet and special programs to minority parents • Encourage ACORN schools' openness to parent participation in decision-making (e.g., on hiring committees, curriculum committees, school leadership teams) • Develop social justice curriculum and work with school staff members to implement it • Work with students on campaigns that target community issues (e.g., environmental justice, police brutality, predatory lending)	• Policies are in place to reduce discrimination in dissemination of information about special programs • Minority parents perceive that school staff openly provide information on programs and facilities • Parents have meaningful input into hiring of principal, curriculum and other important decisions • Curriculum reflects concerns and issues that community faces and may reflect issues that ACORN takes up (e.g., predatory lending, health of community residents, job availability and living wage) • Teachers perceive that mission of ACORN is to push for more democratic environment
4 Build intimate settings for teacher/student relations	
• Participate in alliances that call for reduced class size in S. Bronx elementary schools, city-wide through the Parent Organizing Consortium and state-wide through the Alliance for Quality Education • Document overcrowding in S. Bronx schools and press for reduced class size • Establish small autonomous high schools	• Chancellor considers ACORN demand for reduction of class size in pilot schools in the S. Bronx • Students perceive that teachers in ACORN high schools care about them and are aware of how they are progressing
DATA SOURCES • School observations • Records of spending on facilities/safety • School and/or police records of incidents, accidents	• Survey of teachers, parents, students, and organizers to measure perceptions of changes in safety, working environment or level of respect • Repeat of some techniques used in earlier ACORN studies (e.g., fair program information "testing") • Interviews with school system officials/school staff members, parents, students

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Elaine Simon, Ph.D., a Senior Research Associate at Research for Action, is an anthropologist who has conducted ethnographic research and evaluation in the fields of education, employment and training, and community development. She is Co-Director of Urban Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences and adjunct Associate Professor of Education in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Pennsylvania. Her perspective on education is informed by her background in urban studies and community development. She followed the early 1990s Chicago education reform that devolved power to communities and parents and later the ambitious systemic school reform effort in Philadelphia. Her current research on community organizing for school reform builds on that knowledge and benefits from her broad perspective on urban life and urban school reform.

Marcine Pickron-Davis, Ph.D., a Research Associate with Research for Action, has worked on a range of projects focused on urban school initiatives that promote community and school partnerships, support teacher professional development, and enhance student achievement. As a human relations educator for the past 10 years, Pickron-Davis has had extensive experience in the design and implementation of leadership training, conflict resolution, anti-racism/anti-bias training, and organizational development. She has conducted trainings and workshops for a wide range of audiences in schools, colleges/universities, corporations, and non-profit organizations. Special areas of interest include multicultural education, student activism, and participatory action research.

Chris Brown is the Director of the Schools and Community Program at the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. The Schools and Community Program works with parent and community organizations to increase meaningful parent and community involvement in school reform. He is responsible for providing training and technical assistance to organizations, overseeing research and publication projects, and coordinating cross-site visits. Before coming to Cross City, he served as Community Development Specialist at Chicago's United Way/Crusade of Mercy. Previously, he spent seven years as director of the ACORN Housing Corporation of Illinois, a non-profit group providing home ownership opportunities for low and moderate-income families in Chicago's Englewood community. In addition to his professional work with schools and communities, he also serves as a parent volunteer on the Local School Council of Boone School, the Chicago elementary school his two children attend.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform is a national network of school reform leaders from nine cities: Baltimore, Chicago, Denver, Houston, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, Philadelphia and Seattle. The Cross City Campaign is made up of parents, community members, teachers, principals, central office administrators, researchers, union officials and funders working together for the systemic transformation of urban public schools, in order to improve quality and equity so that all urban youth are well-prepared for post-secondary education, work, and citizenship.

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
407 South Dearborn, Suite 1500, Chicago, IL 60605
Telephone: 312.322.4880 Fax: 312.322.4885
www.crosscity.org

Research for Action (RFA) is a Philadelphia-based non-profit organization engaged in education research and reform. Founded in 1992, RFA works with educators, students, parents, and community members to improve educational opportunities and outcomes for all students. RFA work falls along a continuum of highly participatory research and evaluation to more traditional policy studies.

Research for Action
3701 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104
Telephone: 215.823.2500 Fax: 215.823.2540
www.researchforaction.org

New York ACORN
88 3rd Avenue, Brooklyn, New York 11217
Telephone: 718.246.7900 Fax: 718.246.7939
Attention: Jon Kest

PHOTO CREDITS
New York Acorn: Cover, Pages 8, 11, 12, 15, 19, 22, 24

PUBLICATIONS IN THE
INDICATORS PROJECT SERIES

Strong Neighborhoods, Strong Schools

Successful Community Organizing for School Reform
Appendix: Case Studies
The Education Organizing Indicators Framework
Executive Summary

Case Studies
Alliance Organizing Project
Austin Interfaith
Logan Square Neighborhood Association
New York ACORN
Oakland Community Organizations

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

REPRODUCTION RELEASE

UD 035 295

(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title:	Case Study : New York Acorn Strong Neighborhoods, strong Schools
Author(s):	Elaine Simon, Maraine Pickron-Davis, Chris Brown
Corporate Source:	Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform
Publication Date:	03/02

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

Level 1

☒

Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2A

Level 2A

☐

Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

2B

Level 2B

☐

Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, → please

Signature:		Printed Name/Position/Title:	Chris Brown, Director, Schools + Community
Organization/Address:	Cross City Campaign 407 S. Dearborn, Suite 1500 Chicago, IL 60605	Telephone: 312/ 294-2263	FAX: 312/ 322-4885
		E-Mail Address: cbrown@crosscity.org	Date: 9/12/02

(over)

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:	Cross City Campaign
Address:	407 S. Dearborn, Suite 1500 Chicago, IL 60605
Price:	$10

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:	
Address:	

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education
Box 40, Teachers College, Columbia University
New York, NY 10027

Telephone: 212-678-3433
Toll Free: 800-601-4868
Fax: 212-678-4012

WWW: http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: info@ericfac.piccard.csc.com
WWW: http://ericfacility.org

EFF-088 (Rev. 2/2000)